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*Edited by the*

REV. W. L. WATKINSON

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BY R. WADDY MOSS

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DISCIPLINE OF THE SOUL

*SOME OF ITS AIMS AND METHODS*

BY

R. WADDY MOSS

AUTHOR OF "FROM MALACHI TO MATTHEW"



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I

## Triple Perfection



## TRIPLE PERFECTION

The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.—1 PET. v. 10.

THE Revised Version makes two changes of some importance in this passage. The word "settle" is removed to the margin, on the ground that, though many ancient authorities can be quoted in its favour, the balance of evidence is against it. And the form of the whole passage is changed from that of a prayer to that of an assurance: "The God of all grace shall Himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you." It is not an instance of apostolical desire or pleading, leaving room for all sorts of doubts, whether the peculiar weakness or sinfulness of our own hearts may not prevent God in our case from granting the request; but it is an instance of very strong and positive assertion, with all kinds of authority—of age, experience, and inspiration—at the back of it. Omitting several minor allusions and points of interest, it may be taken as a revelation in order of what God actually is—and of what man may certainly become through His grace.

I. First of all, what God actually is—a "God of all grace"; that is, of grace for all men, and of every kind of grace. There is no need to attempt to discriminate all the niceties in the usage of this word in Scripture, because every

man is thoroughly familiar with it, and ready to use it any day without hesitation. Its contents may perhaps be defined best as unmerited good-will, showing itself in act or waiting in perpetual eagerness for an opportunity to show itself. Now it is one of the peculiarities of the Christian religion that it represents God as in eternal possession of such grace, and as always ready and disposed to exercise it towards man. Other religions are apt to confine the good-will of the God within the limits of the country, or the tribe, or the association of tribes, or to represent the God as gracious only to some men, altogether ungracious and His heart entirely closed against others. Christianity sweeps away all these distinctions, and its worship is never more true to fact than when it praises Jehovah for the "undistinguishing regard," "cast on Adam's fallen race." To all our dull questionings whether God really loves us, — whether His love is but occasional and uncertain, dried up by the demands we make upon it or by the distance it has to traverse, — the one reply the New Testament makes is simply that He is "the God of all grace," in such a sense that no higher degree of grace on the one hand, and on the other no defect or arbitrary restraint of grace, can be conceived of Him.

1. That reply is worth lingering upon, in order that we may teach ourselves more confidently to adore. Through all nature it is easy to trace God's grace or effective good-will towards man, nor is it necessary to suppose that it is altogether confined to man. The kindliness at anyrate or the complacency behind it may readily be conceived as excited or fed, whenever the great God looks out upon His handiwork. That He Himself feels pleasure at the beautiful things He makes, whether they spring into being as the



product of a fresh creation or evolve their glories out of some "closely-packed germ," may be inferred from the phrases in Genesis (He "saw that it was good"), where He is represented as pronouncing a satisfied verdict upon the earth and the waters, the herb yielding seed, the lights in the firmament, and every creature of life after its kind. By some of the ancients even, who knew nothing about Christ and that all-absorbing gift of grace, it was remarked that the Creator had attached a gratuitous gift of pleasure to some of the functions of life, inducing their exercise beyond the limits of economy and use.<sup>1</sup> In the shapes of the leaves, the colours of the flowers, and all the fragrance of the garden, it is possible to see not only the skill of the Creator in providing for the vital purposes of nature, but His generosity also in weaving beauty and use in His processes and decking His handiwork with glories that are almost superfluous but for pleasure. Obviously the God of the world outside of man's spirit is a "God of all grace," who quickens the dull routine of functional life into varied enjoyments, and shows something of what He is in the beauties which He flings so lavishly over the earth.

2. It is much the same with history, God's providential administration of the world. Grace of every kind and degree, of patience, and discipline, and spiritual help, may be traced all through it, vindicating the interests of righteousness, leading men on to ever clearer moral perception and completer moral attainment. To that statement it is questionable whether any exception can be taken. On the part of some men, indeed, it is customary to hold that the testimony is divided, that whilst in certain places the race has declined and fallen, in others only has it risen and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Martineau, *Types*, 3rd ed. ii. 168.

advanced. But there is a distinction, of primary importance in human affairs, which does not seem to warrant such a conclusion. Egypt and Assyria, Greece and Rome, are the countries where the race is generally said to have lost ground or deteriorated. Against that opinion very little can be brought forward, if regard is had only to political influence and military strength, to skill and art, to the organisation of enterprise, and to the material elements of civilisation generally. But what about religious and moral sentiment, the highest and most important means of grading men and the best measure of the differences between races? In every case a multiform idolatry, in which vice itself was consecrated, has given place to the profession of a belief in one God, and to attendant conceptions of duty and virtue with which little that was known in antiquity can be compared. It is chiefly in the splendours that appeal to the senses that these nations are fallen, whilst in the more important matters of creed, and faith, and moral standard God has graciously led them on, sometimes making even the disasters in which a country has been broken, the means of lifting up its people to the better knowledge of Him and of their obligations to Him. ~~Nearer home,~~ think of some of Charles Kingsley's favourite teachings concerning the divine grace shown to Western Europe, and especially to the Teutonic nations, during the last few centuries,—the power of Spain and then of Papal Rome shattered in favour of the free rights of conscience, strength given to the weak in order that the mighty who dishonoured God might be overthrown, the spirit of the Bible steadily making its way amongst institutions and philosophies, amongst the conceptions and impulses that mould public opinion and shape the life of man. Man's progress through the centuries

appears at times to be confused and slow. But that is exactly what might have been expected from man; and if any long period is taken, and his condition at the close compared with his condition at the beginning, as far as morality and the highest and innermost interests of the man are concerned, it will not be easy to question either that the progress has been very real and great, or that the cause of it all has been the overflowing grace of God.

3. But no manifestation of that grace in any other sphere can compare with its manifestation in religion, of which *Sanctification* special notice is taken in the second clause of this verse: "Who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus." Elsewhere God's calling is put in different ways, the sacred writers even delighting to play with the thought and to contemplate it from every side. Now it is "eternal life," ~~and now holiness~~, and now "the peace of God," and now (more marvellous still) "the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ," to which we are called. But as though all these phrases were inadequate to set forth the magnitude of the grace of God, this one carries us a little farther still, and states that the grace is so great as to be able to satisfy itself with nothing less than that we should be with God, partakers of His nature and sharers through eternity of His glory. Of course the apostle added "by Christ Jesus," for no Christian with the thought of God's grace in his mind can keep it separate long from its companion thought of the Saviour. For that there are at least two reasons. Whenever a man wants to know the heart of God, the best mode is to dwell upon the kindness and patience and love of the Saviour amongst men, to trace them all back to the divine source from which they come, and to regard them as but sparks and emanations, dulled in their passage earthwards, of the

ever-glowing Love that sits upon the throne of the heavens. Secondly, and chiefly, the gift of Jesus Christ is at once the most magnificent and the most irrefragable proof Jehovah could give that His grace is like His justice, without defect and without limit. His only-begotten Son to die for sinners; the sinners not merely forgiven but lifted up to Him and enthroned in His glory,—the most exacting and suspicious reason can require no further evidence than that of His right to be called “the God of all grace.” That is the God whom we Christians worship—holy, just, and good, His heart overflowing with grace for every man, lavish of that grace upon every one who trusts Him.

II. Let us turn now to the revelation the verse contains of what man may become. The same second phrase, “called to His eternal glory,” sets it forth in part, but is almost too ideal and even inconceivable for exposition. For what the glory of God is, in the sense in which the word is used here, His own state of blessedness, the eternal beatitude that fills and surrounds Him, of necessity no man can tell. It must include all the gratifications that pure spirit is capable of receiving, with no liability to interruption or loss, and with all kinds of associated joys, each of which exceeds man’s highest imagination. And all this glory is to be ours,—the discord and strife of our natures for ever quieted; the whole moral nature beatified, perfected, assimilated to God. In that respect too the Christian religion does not believe in limitations. It reveals for worship a God whose grace is boundless; it reveals for inspiration a career that almost transcends the limits of imagined perfectness, and passes triumphantly on and upward to God Himself, His likeness, His happiness, His glory.

2. The other part of the revelation of what man may

become can be more easily understood. God "shall Himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you," writes the apostle ; and he may also have added "settle you." Peter was rather fond of the oratorical combination of three words or phrases, not greatly differing in meaning. It suited the vigorous thought and spirit of the man. At the same time, he was far too wise to multiply his words when he had no new meaning to convey ; and we may safely single out the special thought in each of the three words, and then observe how the fourth strengthens the combination, and makes it complete. The first word implies such adjustment as issues in exact fitness to relationship—the making a man precisely what he ought to be in regard of his attitude towards God, towards his fellow-men, towards his own conscience and sense of duty. The second word means radically power to resist and stand firm ; and the third, power of effective strength by means of which conquests are made and obstacles overcome. Those two ideas St. Paul manages to express by the use of the former word alone, with certain qualifying phrases. "The Lord" (he writes to the Thessalonians) "is faithful, who shall stablish you and keep you from evil," so that whatever assaults it makes, it shall be unable to disturb you or to pierce the encompassing shield of His favour. An earlier verse reads, "God our Father . . . comfort your hearts, and stablish them in every good work and word," so that all duty—of speech or deed—is faithfully done, and whatever demand is made is met easily, and even with superfluity and apparent exuberance of strength. The last word, "settle," denotes the laying of a firm foundation, like the rock of which our Saviour speaks, whereon if a man build, his house will be able to defy the vehemence of wind and weather, and will still remain a house after the weather has exhausted

all its moods and the winds have blown themselves away. There is thus a triple perfectness, set before us and even pledged to us in this verse, as the revelation of what man may become; fitness to all moral relationships, strength to resist every assault of Satan, power of prowess and triumph which nothing can hinder,—and all this resting upon, nay, built into a foundation so firm that the might of hell cannot shake it.

To some of us in certain of our moods it may seem but the tantalising exaggeration of a moral ideal, infinitely desirable, but so far above any experience we have ever managed to reach as to be for ever impossible. That is the way, for instance, in which Senancour puts it in certain Reveries, quoted by an authoress who proposes, forsooth, to reform the Christian religion and to make it more human: “Hemmed in on all sides, we feel our faculties only to realise their impotence; we have time and strength to do what we must, never what we will.” Then he goes on to speak of “the icy fate which rules us and our globe, wandering forsaken through the vast silence of the heavens.” Few titles for such fancies could be more appropriate than that of “reveries,” the dream-like musings of a man but half awake. He whose god is an icy fate may well imagine at times that he is hemmed in on all sides, with every moral ambition born only to be frustrated and to die. But in one direction at least before every one of us there is the possibility of unlimited progression; and if we will only bring ourselves to believe thoroughly in a God of all grace, we shall not often be tempted to doubt it. There are, however, two or three facts frequently familiar to the thought of every one, which make the prospect opened up by St. Peter very blessed, but sometimes very dubious. The one is our almost constant



consciousness that the motives of our best acts are mixed, some right, but others in every way unworthy. That "alloy of impure motive"—at times it seems to be a defect we cannot escape from, "tainting our best moments," turning men's mistaken praise into the parent of humiliation and self-reproach. Duties that appear to an outsider perfectly done, but to our own consciences are utterly spoiled by our knowledge of the reasons why we did them,—few of us will be strangers to that experience, or to the way in which it saddens and discourages us. <sup>And</sup> But that is not the worst. Moralists teach that the range of man's duty is "co-extensive with the range of his moral consciousness"; or, in other words, that the standard at which he aims should contain the completeness of everything, which his conscience when most sensitive recognises as dutiful and right. Two miserable results immediately follow. Every one knows that his performances day after day insist upon lingering a great way behind his standard; and every one must occasionally fear that the standard itself has shrunk, because the conscience has been dulled by past trifling and sin. Some one speaks about "the accelerating ratio with which moral light dilutes itself as it recedes" from its source in God; besides which moral vision through misuse contracts many a defect, and becomes dim in its quality and short in its range. With a standard lower than it would have been had we not neglected it, and with a practice that comes far short of the low standard, it is no wonder that we sometimes find it difficult to believe or to hope that we can ever be, in any such sense as that of this passage, lifted up to God, strengthened against temptation, and made perfect.

The emphatic positiveness of this verse will not, however, permit itself to be overlooked. And instead of giving way

to doubt and questioning the possibility of our perfecting, it is better that we should set ourselves to find out how such a blessing may be certainly ensured and enjoyed. St. Peter does not hesitate in his teaching or qualify his words in any way. He says distinctly that only God can do it for us, and that He will do it because His grace is complete and full. We must therefore get the Spirit of God into our hearts by trust in Him, and become possessed of Him, or the thing remains of necessity hopeless. There are indeed at the present day, as there have ever been, strong tendencies to look in other directions for the power that will confer the greatest benefit upon society and upon the individual. Sometimes it assumes the shape of the study of some form of art or branch of science, of devotion to an impossible equality or an unreasonable hierarchy, of a kind of progress that slaughters the unit and passes on to a remote and general triumph, of culture, or combination, or the coercion of the will. But if such saviours are capable some of them of extracting brief snatches of music out of the discord of the human soul, they have had no success hitherto in the attempt to turn its confusion into unbroken melody. And still, when men ask of earth and heaven, in their consciousness of weakness and sin, "To whom shall we go?" earth after all her advances in knowledge and experience, and heaven in all her crowded courts, concur in the answer, "The God of all grace alone is able, and He will perfect, stablish, strengthen you."

Doubt, however, is longlived and hard to kill; and still it may be our fears are whispering to us, Can He perfect me, and will He? It is almost certain that Peter was an old man when he wrote these words; and an old man's counsel and assurance, especially when they are based upon his own

actual experience, are not to be despised. In his youth and earlier manhood he had lacked steadfastness almost more than he had lacked anything, yielding to unregulated impulse, nearly powerless against a small temptation if sudden. Matthew (xiv. 29-31) describes how he once permitted a momentary fear to countervail the evidence even his senses were giving him of the power of faith; and Mark (xiv. 66-70) how at another time the suspicions of a maidservant were sufficient to frighten him into untruthfulness. Speaking now of those very qualities in which he had been found wanting in the hour of trial, he speaks as an old man whom the grace of God had made steadfast, and says, "The God of all grace shall Himself perfect you, as He has me." If, therefore, reason and experience have any validity at all, there is no room left for doubt. It is an argument in which no possible flaw can be found; the grace of God is not liable to exhaustion or abatement, and, therefore, whatever it has actually done for others it can do for us.

We may consequently dismiss every fear about ourselves. Times of temptation and depression, even of spiritual despondency, when "the world comes in as a flood," and before its cares or its mischief our hearts sink within us for a while, we are sure to have. Even Peter does not venture to shut this glad verse against all thoughts of sadness, but reminds us in one of its clauses that suffering generally comes before perfecting. But suffering, and temptation, and sorrow are in the Father's hand a discipline of the spirit, wherein its virtues strengthen and grow full by exercise; and all the threads of trial are woven by Him into a great pattern of purity. Concerning that, Scripture is very explicit. The voice, whose tones are the most authoritative and loving of all, says in substance more than once, "In the

world ye shall have tribulation," and proceeds to say, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." One of the apostles puts the same truth in a somewhat different way: "This is the victory that overcometh the world" (that is to say, everything in the world that makes godly living difficult, man's miseries and responsibilities and sin), "even our faith." We may therefore regard two things concerning life as absolutely certain to the God-fearing. Testing is certain—severe, sometimes altogether unwelcome and painful testing; but if we persist in our faith, and, like Peter (cf. i. 2, "*unto* obedience and sprinkling"), count the sprinkling upon us of the blood of Jesus Christ as the one process in life never to be checked or interrupted, the triumph is as certain as the testing, and at last we shall come out of the suffering, a little wearied by it perhaps and faint, but clad in the robes of victory, and fit to enter the divine glory whereunto we are called. The God of all grace will do it for us. That grace of His will go with us wherever we go, constantly compassing us about, sustaining our hearts, preparing for us blessedness. When we feel a little weak and helpless, in need of more grace, we need but to stretch out our hands and receive it. Relying upon it and diligently using it, we shall be strengthened, stablished, in due course perfected. We may well, therefore, lay to heart the last teaching and the last counsel the apostle gives in this epistle, as the verse is rendered in the Revised Version: "This is the true grace of God; stand ye fast therein."

II

The Plenitude of Spiritual Life





## THE PLENITUDE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.—JOHN x. 10.

To make this verse a complete statement of a complete truth, it needs to be supplemented by a series of attractive passages. All through the New Testament the Saviour invites men to come to Him, with the assurance, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." That some men fail to obtain the blessings He died to secure, is set forth elsewhere as due entirely to their own wilfulness: "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life." An Evangelist, at the close of the main section of his Gospel, lets his readers into the secret aim of his authorship: "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing ye may have life in His name." None of these passages should be entirely forgotten, whilst the mind is fastening its attention chiefly upon the character of the gift of life itself. The life may be had by every one, upon the single condition of coming to Christ for it; and any one who remains without it has none but himself to blame—the scorn or the remissness with which he trifled away his opportunities of grace.

I. There cannot be any uncertainty as to our Lord's assertion in the verse. He states that the purpose of His coming was that He might give men life, and give it them

more abundantly. It would be unreasonable to take the word life in such a context in any other than a religious or spiritual sense. Every Christian probably has a way of his own, in part perhaps peculiar to himself, of representing to himself the meaning of the word. But it is desirable that as exact and definite a meaning as possible should be attached to it. It must include every kind of spiritual good, that was unpossessed before Christ came, or possessed only to a limited degree; and, above all, the quickness and vitality of soul that accompany genuine growth, and are followed in due time by perfection. It means the putting our souls into a right relationship with God, in the absence of which they can hardly be said in the full sense of the term to be living at all; the enabling them to maintain that relationship amidst daily pressure and temptation, in virtue of their inherent and God-given life rather than of external aid; and the perfecting of the relationship at last, when at death the life breaks free from all the entanglements of the body and of the world, and in the immediate presence of the Saviour, becomes complete and unrestrained. The fulness of all the good that men have in Christ Jesus, and especially the power to live without sin in the midst of every possible association of sinfulness — the purpose of Christ's coming was to bring us that.

What, then, is implied in this further phrase, "that they might have it more abundantly"? It can hardly denote that some further gift will be added to that of life, inasmuch as spiritual life in its processes and issues includes all that even a God can give. It means that the life will be given so plentifully, that there will be no need for a devout soul ever to languish, that its life will become buoyant, possessed always of just a little more vital energy

than is really needed either for its endurance of pains or for its triumph over sin. One of the greatest of Methodist theologians once expounded the phrase as a pledge of "more spiritual life than Adam lost, more than unfallen man could ever have known, more than eternity itself can contain." It is evidently a large promise, and on that ground has fitly a place in Holy Scripture, which is fond of large promises. In one passage, for instance, the writer was unable to find in the language he was using a word that was adequate, and so he coined a new one, and in that way managed to express what the Authorised Version renders, God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Even in the Old Testament large words are occasionally met with, especially when there is any reference to the patience or bounty of God. Jeremiah teaches one or two ethical truths more forcibly than they are taught in any other part of Scripture, but he is probably regarded, justly or unjustly, as the dullest and most depressed of inspired writers. Even Jeremiah represents Jehovah once as saying, "I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness." This verse goes beyond that, for, whilst that speaks of satisfaction and satiety, this speaks of superfluity. It sets forth the purpose of Christ's coming as being to bring to man God's gift of a life that can never be exhausted, the energies of which may always exceed our duties, and the range of which has no limit.

The verse may be regarded from another point of view, of special interest possibly to many at the present time. A few years ago a famous book called attention to a definition of life, given by an eminent man of science, whose attitude towards Christianity can hardly be regarded as friendly;

and then proceeded to make good use of it. Perfect life was defined as perfect correspondence with environment. Working with that definition, the meaning of this verse becomes blessed indeed. For the environment of a man's soul consists on the one hand in God and in influences from God (always the most important things about a man), and on the other hand in the opportunities for the discipline and perfecting of character, which the ordinary circumstances of life afford. It is Christ alone who can put a man into proper correspondence with the former part of that environment, or enable him to meet the urgent and ceaseless demands of the latter. A profitable, if not altogether necessary, exercise of thought would be the attempt to re-state some of the leading doctrines of Christianity from the same point of view. The incarnation, for instance, might be regarded as "God opening up to man the possibility of correspondence with Himself through Jesus Christ." Because Christ thus brings us right conceptions of what God is and of what we may become in relation to Him, and, better still, because He breathes into us the power to become it all, the statement of this verse admits almost of a scientific defence. It is Christ alone who can give men what science itself has to recognise as life; and He gives that with such largesse and abundance that, if we like, it will survive all the dangers of this world, and last on in undecaying vigour and ever richer functions throughout eternity.

But there is a better, because simpler, way of putting to ourselves the meaning of this verse. The fact that Christ gives life, found its way from the lips of the Saviour into every part of the New Testament, and from the New Testament into the hymns of every Christian church. Of that fact St. Paul makes constant use. He introduces it into

almost every Epistle, and he applies it to every stage of the Christian's course, from conversion to the consummation of all things. If, for instance, there are saints and faithful men at Ephesus, the explanation he gives is simply that when they were "dead in trespasses and sins" God "quickened" them. About the same time it became necessary to stir up the disciples at Colosse to dutifulness by some reference to the future, its welcome or its wrath; and accordingly the apostle strengthened his appeal by a similar allusion: "When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory." Few hymns are better suited for the class-meeting, or for any opportunity of worship within the fellowship of Christ, than the one in which the strain quickly passes from confident prayer to assured possession—

Conqueror of hell, and earth, and sin,  
Still with Thy rebel strive;  
Enter my soul, and work within,  
And kill, and make alive.  
More of Thy life, and more, I have,  
As the old Adam dies.

In another place exegesis and praise are blended; the singer gratefully rejoices in as much of the life as he already has, and seeks the further privilege and power into which it unfolds—

Acceptance through His only name,  
Forgiveness in His blood, we have;  
But more abundant life we claim  
Through Him who died our souls to save,  
To sanctify us by His blood,  
And fill with all the life of God.

The first two lines may be true of most of us; but not until the last line begins to interpret itself in experience, shall we know either the meaning of the divine saying

preserved by St. John, or the wealth of the inheritance to which we have been begotten in Christ

II. 1. Christ's gift of life to men may, ~~therefore~~, be considered conveniently in its three stages. It begins with the forgiveness of sins, it implies and is the power to live without sin, and it issues in life with Christ in heaven. Few men would object to acknowledge that there is nothing under the sun more desirable than that triple gift. Unless indeed a man has it, at least in part and in promise, he is living under the power of sin, and hardly deserves to be described, as far as his spirit is concerned, as living at all. What he calls his life is a willing submission or a struggling and reluctant submission, but in any case a submission, to what he knows to be hateful and wrong. Governed by vagrant impulse, by passion or appetite, he stumbles on day after day under an increasing burden of evil habits. Their evil his conscience is quite keen enough to recognise, but their burden no human will by itself is strong enough to shake off. At frequent intervals, under some special influence from God, the man passes through a familiar experience. After resolving in all solemnity that, whatever it may cost him, he will allow nothing in the future to lead him astray, he is caught in some heedless moment by an old temptation, and, almost before he knows it, finds himself upon his back again. For men in that hapless but hopeful condition, this verse is first of all an intimation that they are trying a wrong and impossible remedy for the faults of their characters. What they really want is not the exercise of a will already enfeebled and betainted with sin, but a new life, the exercise of a quickened and sanctified will. That new life is offered to every man on the simple requirement that he come to Christ for it. There is no doubt as

to the ability or the readiness of the Saviour to give it. Many centuries during which men have been making every kind of moral experiment, have elapsed since our Lord first spoke these words, but He has never yet been known to turn away a conscience-smitten and trusting suppliant.

2. That, however, is only a small part of what the life which Christ gives is to a man. It also braces and strengthens his whole soul, enables him to put forth vigorous action against sin, to triumph over it and live without it. Such statements may possibly at first excite repugnance in the case of many who hear them; for some of us know too much about ourselves, our failures and present weaknesses, to listen to them with much complacency or patience. We are tempted to imagine that the feebleness and imperfection of the past are the measure of what is practicable in the future. It is well, therefore, to try to find out exactly what Scripture has to say on the subject, beginning with the teaching of a tried and needy man like St. Paul, and working back to that of the Saviour. In the epistles of the former there are certainly some paragraphs, of part of which the tone is not altogether encouraging. The thought of his own weakness and insufficiency more than once determines his words, and sometimes his heart seems almost about to break at the remembrance of the body of death he has to carry about with him. But always, just as he is apparently coming to the verge of despair, he feels the throbblings of this Christ-given life within him, and breaks out into some enthusiastic utterance—"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The context of that passage shows that, whatever else it means, it means primarily "all things in relation to character." It is the same with ourselves. Scripture in a hundred places puts before us what it some-

times calls perfection—"the entire removal of all defects, the possession in full of human nature as God made it and meant it to be," the whole circle of possible human excellences. Pointing to that, it says to every man, on the one hand, Aim at it, ceaselessly and in every wise and resolute way, with the use of every faculty and every resource; and on the other, Be quite sure that in Christ you can reach it. "Perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect": the New Testament puts these words into the lips of the Saviour Himself in the course of His great opening Sermon on the Mount. "As He which called you is holy,"—so one of the apostles wrote, confirming his appeal by an allusion that calls up passage after passage from the Old Testament,—“be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy, for I am holy.” What can passages of this kind mean, except that in matters of character and morality it is possible for the Spirit of Christ so to mature and beatify a man, that he may in one respect at least be compared with God? There can never of course be any such comparison in regard to the sovereign attributes of God, His power, or knowledge, or self-sufficiency, or even in regard to the quantity, the completeness or absoluteness of His holiness. But there are old figures, not of perfect adequacy, but useful and suggestive aids to the soaring thought of man. Just as the single sun-ray, that comes slanting through a crevice, is as perfect in its intrinsic splendour as is the glory of the midday sun, the single dew-drop as perfect as the whole sphere of earth and water; so this inbreathed life can so purge and adorn the human soul, that the great God Himself condescends to compare it with Himself. He calls His children to no limited or circumscribed career; the life He gives them expands and develops,



until it determines every motive and every practice, and lifts them up to God.

There are matters of common observation, and phrases in popular use, that strengthen or illustrate such teaching. Every one has known a lad or a young man, perhaps a son of his own, buoyant and sparkling, full of spirits, almost unable to control his exuberant energies, eager for something to do, and addressing himself to any little task with a sanguine enthusiasm, which his seniors sometimes check and generally envy. Men say simply that the lad is full of life ; and the explanation is at once accepted as sufficient. Because of that fulness of life, he is able to cherish many a hope and many a confidence that are apt to forsake or to grow feeble in the "years that bring the philosophic mind." To the vigour and freedom of youth, freighted with no dull customs, knowing as yet nothing of "the inevitable yoke" which the days are preparing, life is all strength and mastery, and its limitations do not appear. So, but with many differences, which are all in the favour of religion, the life which Christ imparts makes man again a fountain of vigour, and enables him to face temptation and duty with a confident strength that counts nothing impossible, and in the name of the Lord sets up its banners. The confidence is based, not as before upon inexperience and the mere plenitude of vitality, but upon the conviction that God is with us, and is directed chiefly against sin ; and therefore its hindrances to godly living and the havoc it is making can be confronted with compassionate help for the sufferers, but with fearlessness for ourselves, because with two great convictions—first of all, that God is stronger than sin ; and secondly, that, God being on our side, we too must be stronger than sin. Of all the experiences that are

possible in the world, that at any rate is worth having—to be able to go quietly and do our daily work in the midst of the play of sinful influences, to listen to anything that is said about the exhaustion or death of the gospel, to read the charming essays in which every grace of style or fancy is used to clothe the miserable belief that the race is going simply from bad to worse, without a single doubt but that the Lord will keep us and will eventually triumph everywhere; day after day to know of a truth that sin is not regaining its hold upon us, but that by the grace of God we are gradually getting freer from it, able to resist its assaults more easily, walking more closely in the communion of the Lord. If a man be disposed to say, That is not the case with me, though I believe myself to be a genuine Christian; the obvious answer is, It ought to be the case with you, and would be if you were a thorough Christian. The fault does not lie in any partial gift of grace or fulfilment of promise on Christ's part, but in partial devotion on our part. If we make the devotion complete, and let the life Christ gives take possession of us and put forth its vital energies without hindrance or check, it will quickly become the case with us. In the cultivation of personal character, and to the confusion of sin, our alert, consecrated, God-possessed soul will do things, over which the angels will rejoice, and seeing which the Saviour will be satisfied.

3. But we have not yet exhausted the meaning and contents of this gift of life. Some expositors are inclined to interpret the phrase "more abundantly" as little more than a substitute for the adjective "eternal," which was so often linked with the word "life" upon our Saviour's lips. Their interpretation is probably not correct, and yet the analogy of Scripture shows that such an idea must have been

included. The life which Christ gives is subject to no collapse or loss when man dies, but lasts on, developing in richness for ever. It is sometimes said that the next assault upon Christianity will be made from the standpoint of the young science of comparative religions; and hints are dropped to the effect that the attack will be more formidable than any that has preceded it, and the results more fatal. Less fatal they can perhaps hardly be, Christianity having hitherto shown a wonderful faculty of survival. But it may be well occasionally, and will certainly not tend to the destruction of faith, to trace, in relation to the one not unimportant detail of eternity, the comparison between the life which Christ gives, and the utmost that any other known religion has ever professed to be able to give. Some of the other religions do not seem to have cared much about the future, or to have been willing to speak about it in very positive terms. To them it was "a perhaps into which there enter very few elements of probability." If they could secure protection and peace for their devotees, the goodwill of the gods as manifested in secular prosperity and success at arms, or if they could but avert the displeasure or wrath of the powers that were supposed to be quick in resentment against man, they deemed their principal work done, and chose to be either silent or vague as to the sequels of death. Those religions even that spoke of a personal and conscious future life, in so far as they were untouched by Christian influences, represented it generally as so dull and cheerless that few men can have been emotionless enough to desire it; in interest and the possibilities of pleasure and joy, the present was much to be preferred. The greatest man who lived under the Greek civilisation, when he was condemned to death, parted from his

judges, with the perplexed but manly farewell, "The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live; which is better, God only knows": and one of the best-esteemed of Greek teachers counselled his hearers to use well the present, and to expect nothing afterwards—

Let those who live do right ere death descendeth;  
The dead are dust; mere nought to nothing tendeth.

Another religion, which some men are now trying to revive and to spread, promises after death a life from which are removed all the characteristics of life,—an eternal rest of the spirit, with the eclipse, if not with the entire loss, of personal consciousness. The doctrine of immortality, again, dates back in Egypt to the earliest known times, and seems to have been more highly cherished there than in any other nation of which the history has been preserved; but the immortality was not attractive. On one of the funeral tablets that have been found, a specimen of many, a lady is represented as thus from her grave addressing her husband: "Follow thy desires each day, and let not care enter thy heart, as long as thou livest upon earth. For as to Amenti [the abode of the dead], it is the land of heavy slumber and of darkness, an abode of sorrow for those who dwell there. . . . As to the God who is here, Death Absolute is his name; he calleth on all, and all men come to obey him, trembling with fear before him." Christ was the first to teach men, not simply that their souls would survive the grave, for men knew that before, but that after death their souls might be in perfect bliss, every power expanding and every grace ripening, that no dread moment would ever come when His gift of life would be taken away, or the

endless growth of which the human spirit is capable would be checked and ended. That is our Lord's gift of life to men. He puts a small germ into their spirits, which too often seems to grow but slowly in the uncongenial climate of this world ; but none the less, if we are faithful to conscience and truth, to the God who is the source of both, it does grow, clothing the spirit with an ever more abundant fruitage of all the virtues, making it upright, patient, pure. When death comes, God simply transplants the growth into the court of the Father's house ; and in that sweet and nourishing air it flourishes without hindrance to all eternity. And this gift of life in all its parts and stages—the forgiveness of sins, the power to live without sin, and the eternal efflorescence—may be had by any penitent sinner, who full of faith comes for it to his Saviour.



III

The Evil Self, Dead or Dying





## THE EVIL SELF, DEAD OR DYING

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom [or, perhaps more correctly, *through which*] the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.—GAL. vi. 14.

ST. PAUL appears to have been in the habit of authenticating his Epistles by adding at their close a few sentences, sometimes only a single one, in his own handwriting. In this case he writes more than he wrote in any other; and in the paragraph commencing with the eleventh verse, he sums up the main lessons of the Epistle in a few eager and unarticulated sentences. First of all, he exhibits the motive of the Judaising teachers against whom the letter was directed. They are trying, he says, to make you submit to circumcision, not from conscientious conviction of its necessity, though they may put that forward as their plea, but in order really that they may save themselves from persecution at the hands of their fellow-countrymen by pointing to you as their converts, and thus getting the credit of zeal for the law; they want to make capital out of you, to "glory in your flesh" and to protect their own. But, adds the apostle, in one of those energetic outbursts which characterise this Epistle, Far be it from me to glory in anything save the cross of Christ, on which the sin of the world dies to the believer, and the believer to sin.

I. The exact meaning of such a statement, however

startling it may seem in the completeness of its opposition to prevalent ambitions, can be determined without difficulty. The best way to do so is perhaps by lingering in thought for a moment upon each of the words "cross" and "glory," and then upon their marvellous combination. The one word would suggest to the men of St. Paul's generation almost everything that is most hateful and horrible, and its flavour to them would be not unlike that of the word "gallows" to ourselves, though the latter term in its modern use implies no such prolonged agony as is implicit in the former. The second word would be the one used to describe the strongest feelings of delight and exultation, the compounded emotions with which a man in his inflated moods regards what he considers his greatest treasure or most splendid deed. And now the apostle takes these two words, the one a symbol of the utmost possible disgrace and pain, the other a symbol of the highest possible appreciation, and links them together in a phrase that was novel and paradoxical enough to startle the thinking world: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross." He disdains all other delights, methods, resources, ambitions; and, asserting the cross to be the supremest secret of his own life, he presents it to men as the remedy of all mischief and the sum of all joy.

In one respect, every one probably imitates the apostle. We single out something we have or desire to have, something that we consider to be superlatively excellent; and in some way of greater or less emphasis we say, Far be it from me to glory save in that. One man will say, There is nothing better than professional success or political influence—than wealth, the power which attaches to it, and the enjoyments it commands—than culture, a mind trained in every study and familiar with all knowledge. That all

men should speak well of him, and the atmosphere about him be always congenial and grateful, may to another seem the most royal crown of life or the completest of its satisfactions. But outside of the little group of feeble souls who are bare of fancy and content to drift, there can be few men from whose scheme of life are absent alike a coveted object of pursuit and an imagined glorying on its attainment. The well-meaning and the upright even, unless Christ attract their master passions, fix them generally upon some kind of human possession or some form of human praise, and practically give themselves up to getting it.

Within the sphere of professed religion the same practice can be traced, as this Epistle distinctly enough indicates. Some article of their creed, or some peculiarity of ritual or polity, is singled out by professedly Christian men, and advocated as the consummate product of human thought, or the indispensable instrument of human discipline. In the case of the Galatians, it was circumcision that was so treated; the Judaizing teachers tried to persuade the converts to submit to that rite, on the ground that otherwise their faith in Christ would be ineffective. Circumcision was thus honoured as a kind of seal to conversion, which was alleged to remain imperfect without it. At the present day, of course, it is not circumcision that is magnified; but there is a strong tendency, both in the literature of controversy and in practical religious life, to fasten upon some doctrine or ordinance or denominational difference, and so to exaggerate its importance that the supremacy of Christ is threatened. He who, on the other hand, undervalues the ordinance, is apt to pride himself upon his freedom from traditional bonds, upon the tolerant spirit which is in danger of making him almost equally indifferent to everything. Creed or the

absence of a creed, a multitude or a paucity of sacraments, an extravagant ritual or a bare one,—no wide observation is necessary to find instances where every one of these things is turned into a glory.

St. Paul in this passage shows us the right course to take. All through the Epistle, indeed, he has borne in mind his great design,—to keep the cross, as the only symbol of freedom from sin and of death to sin, before the minds of the Galatian Christians and of their successors. To anything that attempted to come between the cross and the sinner, to obscure its vision or to appropriate its honours, he has steadily refused quarter. And now in this last paragraph he gathers his strength for the final rebuke of those who deny its sufficiency, or try to evade its reproach. After unveiling their motives, he lets his indignation against them and his love for his Saviour escape in this magnificent outburst, probably the first “God forbid” he ever introduced into his letters, and in some respects the strongest of them all: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross.” In an earlier verse he wrote, “O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?” as though their recent blindness to the beauty of the cross could be accounted for only upon the supposition of some demoniacal influence or charm of witchcraft. About the same time he wrote to another church, “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” A number of similar passages recur at once to the memory; and altogether it is quite evident, from what he tells us about himself in these Epistles, that the central and sovereign influence in his life was the cross of Christ. From that he derived all his inspiration, strength, hopes; and in that therefore he did well to glory.

II. Such a statement demands the most careful investigation; for when a man says, "I glory in the instrument and symbol of a public execution," it is difficult to imagine him worthy of attention, unless there be some hidden and unexpected meaning in his words. That is in substance part of what the apostle says. For whatever else the death of Christ was, the use of a cross points primarily to the fact that it was a public execution, inflicted upon one who was judged to be a criminal, with every accompaniment of shame and pain. The present generation in this country hardly knows what public executions are, since their fathers became so disgusted at the revolting spectacle as to abolish it, and to insist upon the carrying out in private of the last sentence of the law. It is questionable whether any modern execution can compare in barbarity and horror with the infliction of the penalty of crucifixion. In some respects until recent years all were alike; and indecent crowds gathered to make holiday, untouched by the remorse or anguish of the sufferer, revelling or rioting amidst his pangs. But of all kinds of mortal torture, to that of death by crucifixion must probably be assigned the palm for intensity and for duration. With every nerve in the body frayed or strained by its weight, the insensibility that was longed for refused to come, and several days sometimes elapsed before the shades came down upon the victim. As though that were not enough, for the execution of Jesus some special horrors were prepared. On either side of Him hang malefactors, in order that in death He might be outraged by the companionship of crime; and around the cross collect groups of officials and priests, exulting in mockery over the apparent helplessness of their foe. Is that a thing to glory in—the death in shame of a criminal, condemned by the courts of his country with the

consent of its political and religious leaders? St. Paul says it is; and wherever the opinion of the world has been touched by Christianity, it says so too. In the near prospect of that death, He who was about to undergo it viewed it with complacency, and said, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." And so complete has been the revenge of history, that whenever a man (whatever his creed) wants to single out the event which is the greatest of all and the most marvellous display of heroism and humanity, he generally fastens upon the public execution of Jesus of Nazareth, the one incomparable triumph of grace in the annals of all the centuries.

1. Few things are easier than to vindicate, in greater or less detail, the wisdom of St. Paul's thus glorying and the approval it has almost always received. Christ Himself once said that His cross would quickly prove a centre of attraction, whose influence would stream out in every direction upon all men: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." In more senses than one that prophecy has been already in part fulfilled. Historians, sacred and secular alike, have been fond of pointing in different ways to the central position which the cross occupies in the progress of the race. Whilst one describes the ages that preceded it as its preparation, another interprets the ages that have followed as the evolution of the principles and powers that were embedded in germ within it. From it in the case of every civilised people have proceeded moral forces, that have uniformly checked national iniquity, and encouraged national righteousness. It has moulded public opinion, and restrained unholy impulse, and made itself by now probably the most powerful factor, even if often silent and unrecognised, in determining the civil life of almost all the

dominant races in the world. As the result therefore of the comparison and valuation of the causes that underlie the best features of modern civilisation, it is reasonable enough to glory in the cross on account of its intrinsic secular importance.

2. Think next of its effects upon moral theory and practice, and that opinion will be significantly confirmed. That the general level of moral life over the greater part of the world has been lifted up during the present era, hardly admits of question or denial. To that result the causes that have contributed are both numerous and diverse in their character, but a foremost place amongst them must of necessity be given to the influence of the cross, but for which they would have been inadequate and ineffective. It is true that occasionally there have been periods during which the moral power of Christianity has seemed to be neutralised and untraceable for a time, just as there have been periods or areas during which human speculation has so fundamentally altered the teaching of Christianity as to make it doctrinally a radically different religion from that of its Founder; but in neither case has the harm been permanent and fatal. The latter changes are of the greatest evidential value; and concerning them Dr. Fairbairn makes the striking remark, in his valuable study of the *Place of Christ in Modern Theology*,<sup>1</sup> "There is nothing that so proves His divinity as His being able still to live and still to act within forms so little congenial to His Spirit." And the former intervals of apparent powerlessness have been compared with the curious belts of air that are said to occur in certain states of the atmosphere; within the belt no noise at all, although outside of it and around the air is reverberating with sound.

<sup>1</sup> 1st ed. p. 110.

Whenever the moral force of Christianity has seemed to enter such a belt, and to succumb for a time before the indifference or the difficulties that were in its way, never more than a few years have had to elapse before it has clothed itself with more than its ancient vigour, and sent a mightier impulse towards righteousness through the heart of the nations. To-day it is able to point to a number of achievements, the credit for which only a few are disposed to withhold. It has driven some vices into darkness, and stamped them with infamy. It has improved and exalted the ideal of character, the contents of character, and the whole criticism of conduct and practice. The relation of God to man has on the one hand been made certain, searching, and close ; and, on the other hand, upon the issues of the future a great light has been cast, and its perplexities resolved into confidence. Of the philanthropy, too, which in wise and unwise forms has become a leading characteristic of modern life, traces can be found in antiquity by one who is patient in search, and not too suspicious of proof ; but the vastness of its present bulk and the energy of its gracious enterprises are a sufficient evidence of the thoroughness with which the spirit of the cross is changing the tendencies of the race. Our conclusion is therefore strengthened. Not only as a historical landmark, but as a moral power in the minds and hearts of men, the cross of Christ is without a rival ; and he acts wisely who chooses it as his chief glory.

3. But it is not likely that considerations of this kind would enter very largely into St. Paul's thoughts. He was ready enough to use them, as several paragraphs in his Epistles show, whenever he believed that thereby any one could be brought to fuller assurance concerning Christ, or to fuller devotion. But there was one thing of which he was fonder



of writing than of either the Saviour's position in history, or the benefits that would accrue to the race from His death; and that was the spiritual meaning of the cross, the power which it puts within the reach of every man to obtain deliverance from sin and to live a life of holiness amidst daily temptation and care. That is his subject in the second clause of this verse. He glories in the cross, because by it the world is crucified to him, and he to the world; and consequently, its attractions for him being broken, and his desire for it dried up, there was little or nothing left in him to which it could appeal, and against its charms as against its terrors he was clad in armour proof. In other words, he glories in the cross, because he believed that his iniquity and "the iniquity of us all" met in Him who was crucified, and that His death was therefore a great sacrifice for sin, whereby the means of forgiveness and of purification are procured for every man. Since Paul died for that faith, many another man has held it, and not found it vain. Art has delighted to represent the great doors of the house of sin as opening of their own accord at the approach of the white banner that "portrayed bears a bleeding Lamb," and the captives as trooping forth to hail their Deliverer, each cleansed by the blood that was "shed on the tree." And such art does not in the slightest degree exceed the simple fact; for on the cross the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world, and before the cross every man may stand, or kneel, with the adoring conviction, My sin formed part of the burden that He bore. That is the reason why we should glory in the cross. It does for us, if we will let it, what nothing else can do—rids us of the torturing consciousness of sin, and gives us instead the assured favour of God, and a great ocean of peace in our hearts. It will do that for

any man who will trust wholly in the Christ and glory in His cross.

That, however, is far from being all that it will do, for St. Paul's words obviously imply much more than the forgiveness of sins. On the one hand he says, "The world is crucified to me"; certainly he did not mean everything in the world, or the world in all its aspects and influences. No one is so capable as the Christian of enjoying and profiting from the wonderful universe in which he lives, its revelations or its secrets, or its continual testimony to the glory of the God who made it, or from all the innocent mirth and converse and duty of human society. He means the world as the sphere of temptation, of forgetfulness of God, of sin. That, he says, was crucified to him—dead to him, or dying; so that its influence was not merely neutralised and out-balanced, it was ceasing or had already ceased to have any influence at all. On the other hand, he says, "I am crucified to the world," that is, dead to it or dying, so that all passions and desires with respect to it are weakening, rapidly disappearing, if not already gone. If we knit the two phrases together, it is evident that a very high state of grace is implied. Desire for the world, and every passion to which it could appeal, dead—temptation from the world, and every influence with which it could ply the soul, dead: it denotes nothing less than complete separation between the crucified saint, and everything in the worldly system of things that could lead him to sin. Sometimes we doubt, and sometimes we wonder, whether it is possible for us under any circumstances to reach such an experience in this life. The obvious answer is that, whatever may be the case with ourselves, St. Paul distinctly asserts that he had reached that experience himself. He does not glory in it, or regard his

attainments with any complacency; sentiments of that kind cannot survive for a moment in the holy nature that is crucified with Christ. All glorying and complacency he reserves for the cross, that had wrought such wonders in him. But whilst rendering every possible tribute of praise to the Divine grace, he does yet describe his own condition as one of complete separation from sin; and turning with proud and exultant eyes to his Saviour, he says, Through Thee the world in its influence and evil power is dead to me, and I am dead to it. Since he stood in no exceptional relation to the cross, it can do as much for us as it did for him. The whole paragraph, indeed, is concerned with the conditions of ordinary conversion, and with experiences that may be common to every disciple. There can be nothing, therefore, in the nature or life of any man, that need withhold him from the enjoyment of the blessing of this double crucifixion, if he but glory in the cross, as the apostle did.

We are now prepared to estimate with some adequacy the value of the cross to ourselves. If it did nothing more for a man than stay the rebukes of conscience, and transform into good assurance the persecuting sense of sin, it would be the thing to glory in; but it does infinitely more than that. Its influence flows into every part of the spirit, and affects or alters all its relations. Into the heart it introduces a new motive, and so sustains and feeds it there that the entire purpose of the life is changed. With the new motive it confers a new power, so that a man can traverse the world's perilous places, extracting its pure pleasures and doing his duties without sin. Whatever in him is evil, instinct, impulse, desire, aim,—whatever would lead him to break the laws of God, or to grieve his Father by heedless-

ness,—it gradually crucifies and kills, until at last all sin is driven out, and the sin that is without is powerless to harm, and the man can take up the confident words of his Saviour, and say in all sincerity, “When Satan cometh, he hath nothing in me; the cross of Christ has slain everything in me upon which he could possibly work, and enables me to keep my heel pressed down well upon his head.” There is probably nothing that a man more eagerly desires, at least in his best moods and moments, than the power to say that. To be rid of sin, and to be able to live without sin, is a prize for which no price would be too high. The message of the Gospel is, that the cross can do it all for any man, that nothing but the cross can do it. Other means of perfecting, however full of human promise, are useful enough as aids, but by themselves nugatory and worthless. By the discipline of resolve and restraint, vice can be controlled, but not killed; let the control be slackened, and it will soon be found that the vanishing point of evil is still far away. Everything even that constitutes religion in its visible aspects—a well-articulated system of theology, faultless ceremonial, sentiments of rapture or of awe; they may all be made helpful to the great process of sanctification, but unless personal glorying in the cross lie at the bottom of them all and run through them all, they will secure for no man a perfect triumph over evil. Of that fact this paragraph alone is sufficient proof. Writing about the most careful attention to the visible parts of religion, to everything by means of which it is possible “to make a fair show,” St. Paul brushes them all aside as, apart from utter devotion to Christ, powerless to save. Using about the strongest words he could find, he says vehemently, as an example and inspiration for all who should come after, “God forbid that

I should glory in any one of them, or in anything at all save the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"From henceforth let no man," and no mood of fearfulness, "trouble" us; we too "bear branded on the body the marks of Jesus," proclaiming Him to be our only Lord and glory, pledging His defence and His sanctifying grace to the end.



IV.

The Satisfaction of the Saviour





## THE SATISFACTION OF THE SAVIOUR

He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.—  
ISA. liii. 11.

CONCERNING this chapter a famous question was once asked, which is still at the present day sometimes repeated: "Of whom speaketh the prophet this?" To that question several different answers have been given. By some it has been supposed, in ancient times and in modern, that the prophet was referring to the sufferings of the nation of Israel,—either of Israel as a whole or of the righteous section of the nation,—and to the benefits that would accrue from those sufferings to the surrounding peoples, some of whom were contemptuous of Israel, all of whom may be described as ignorant of God. But to defend that opinion it is necessary to paraphrase and interpret some of the statements in a way that no sound rules of exposition will allow. Even Jewish historians are wont to represent the sufferings of their people as the consequence of sin, whereas these verses speak repeatedly of sufferings that are vicarious. St. Paul says in one place that the fall of the Jews "is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles"; but he is so far from meaning that the Jews suffered in the stead of the Gentiles, that he proceeds at once to argue by implication: If the world has been blessed notwithstanding the unfaithfulness of the Jew, how much more would it have been blessed if Israel had

been true? It is quite possible that the great figure of "The Servant of Jehovah," standing in the front of all these verses was designed to have more than a single interpretation, to be reverently approached from many sides, to be full of appeals to the patriotism and to the piety of the Israelite; but at the same time it is no mere abstract conception, but the figure of a living and separated Person, "more perfect than human believer ever was, uniting in himself more richly than any other messenger of God everything that was necessary for the salvation of man, and finally accomplishing what no mere prophet" ever attempted. And some of the authorities of the synagogue even might be quoted in favour of the almost universal Christian opinion, that the Man of Sorrows of this chapter, despised and yet triumphant, is no other than the Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the world, who once trod the lowest levels of human pain and misery, and who hereafter will sit enthroned, on His head many crowns, and in His heart the satisfaction of assured and unlimited victory.

This verse, or part of a verse, refers to and links together both of these parts or periods in our Lord's career, the travail and the triumph; though there is some uncertainty as to the precise character of the bond which it establishes between them. By some the passage is rendered "free from" distress of soul, by others merely "after" the distress, and by others "because of" his distress. But there is no doubt as to its general meaning. It compares the humble, human stage of our Lord's earthly mission with its eventual success and glory; and unites the two together in a way that implies both a connexion in time and a connexion of cause. There is the travail of His work upon earth, with all its pains and throes; and there is the eternal satisfaction with which He

will see the results—"many sons brought to glory," sin everywhere smitten down and destroyed, a race lifted up to God.

I. The story of the earlier part of that work has been made by the Gospels about the most familiar to Christian men of all the things they know. How well this phrase, "the travail of His soul," describes it all! The fundamental signification of the word is laborious and enduring work. In one book of the Bible it is used of the bread-winner's daily labour, unceasing because "his mouth craveth it of him"; and in another (Ecclesiastes) of the wearying and unbroken labour, that consents to no repose or change, and gradually dries up the very heart of the labourer. The travail of the Saviour's soul can be traced almost from Bethlehem to Calvary; one inflexible purpose haunting Him, that purpose confronted by the sin and craft of devils and men, yet ever indomitably pushing its way to the Cross upon which it was to be accomplished. There was the travail of waiting, during the long years of the life at Nazareth, during the tedious process of training the disciples that followed. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened"—once He actually said it; many a time the words must have surged up, clamorous for utterance. There was the travail of His own personal temptations, in the solitude of the wilderness, in the protests of Peter, in the eagerness and impulse of the multitudes; for that such temptations were real, every one must believe, who is not prepared to deny the humanity of the Saviour, or to render it imperfect and nugatory by an inconsistent doctrine of His Person. There was the travail with the unbelief and hardness of heart of the very men whom He was seeking to save. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not,"

and to a heart like His the spiritual aloofness of the multitude must have meant anguish. He who remembers Gethsemane, the Cross, the great and bitter cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" will have little difficulty in concluding that no human soul has ever been visited by such heavy and continuous travail as broke the heart of the Lord. He was God, sinless and holy; and "upon Him was laid the iniquity of us all." Every pure spirit is pained by the mere sight of vice. The spirit of Christ was so pure that Satan could find nothing in Him, yet He persisted, not in separating Himself from sin so as to avoid its every aspect, but for our sakes in waging ceaseless battle with it, until in the loneliness of the passion He had suffered the full penalty of sins not His own, and had triumphed over them for ever on the Cross. If the travail of His soul be measured by the distance between His holiness and the guilt with which He consented to be charged, it will become obvious that the travail is without a parallel in human history, more bitter, intense, and prolonged than any anguish beneath which human spirit has ever been crushed.

II. It is sometimes said, and the statement may perhaps find support in some of our own fancies in our duller moods, that all this travail was unnecessary and has proved fruitless, or at least that it has not accomplished, and is not likely to accomplish, anything like what Christ in enduring it expected. That Christianity is a failure, has been the theme of many a critic of the faith, and now and again the suspicion of many a tempted believer. One man, for instance, after stating his opinion that there exists in this, and still more in other countries, a widespread tendency to give up a belief in Christianity, proceeds seriously to announce such curious conclusions as the following: "Christianity often

favours spirituality and salvation at the expense of morals." "It may be questioned whether that religion does not often produce as much anxiety and mental distress as it does gladness and content." "It has a very limited influence on the world at large," and "as a means of relieving human suffering it is not to be compared for efficiency with science." Those are said to be the results of an "inquiry," professedly historical, and from it a reader may at least learn how history should not be studied. Others tell us that intellectually Christianity is unreasonable in its teaching, whilst in practice it tends to insincerity and deception. There are certainly one or two facts, which few can fail to observe, and which seem at first sight partially to warrant such conclusions. For Christianity has now been at work in certain parts of this world for many centuries. But even in those places where it has had upon its side almost every possible advantage, where it has been supported by the authorities and illustrated by every kind of genius, where it has secured the control of the powerful influences of public opinion and of the opportunities of education, it has not succeeded in making society pure, or even the average character of its own agents and adherents faultless. Its officials are still sometimes ambitious or intolerant, vulgar or veneered; and, just as in the days of the Saviour, the net gathers of every kind, and a specimen of the tares is occasionally found in the vestry or by the table. And though the influence of Christianity has been for so long a time present in the world, and in some places so powerfully encouraged, as yet there is no part of the earth to which this verse from Isaiah applies,—upon which the Saviour can be imagined to look, and to be satisfied with what He sees.

The same conclusion admits of being put into a more

personal form. There can be few Christians who are not sometimes tempted to think that religion is proving for themselves something of a failure. Years ago, it may be, we gave ourselves to Christ; and yet there are faults of temper, weaknesses under temptation and in the discharge of duty, elements of discontent and self-seeking and sin, still present in our natures, and often apparently even supreme there. That Christ should look down from His throne, and be satisfied with what He discovers in us, is the last fancy that some of us dare entertain. Our own consciences are leaden, and our sense of right and wrong not unerring, and yet we can rarely find anything in our spirits to which we can attach the name of virtue, or upon which we can look with even nascent satisfaction. Instead of imagining that we are perfected and matured, we are tempted rather to conclude that we can never be perfected and matured, and that we shall have to continue to the end, stumbling and feeble, a bundle of drooping promises of virtue fragrant to neither God nor man.

III. There are several obvious methods of dealing with these complaints of the failure of Christianity as a whole, and suspicions of its failure in our own lives. The intractability of the material with which it has to deal might be pleaded, and natural science imitated in her insatiable demand for time. Or it may be possible to put ourselves in thought, with this prophet, not in the midst but at the ultimate end of the Lord's career, or we may try to discover whether there really are, in society and in the heart of man, processes of progress that are tending to success, and that make it in any adequate sense probable or certain. It will thus be quickly found that the success of Christianity in dealing alike with individuals and with peoples,

in relation to everything that concerns morality and religion, has been so great as even to guarantee the eventual satisfaction about which this prophet speaks.

1. In reasoning men, a certain amount of thought must lie behind and affect, if not determine, their practice. Few contrasts are more complete than that in the Western nations between men's thoughts about God at the time when Christ appeared, and their thoughts since His teaching has informed and moulded them. At the earlier period the idea of a God had either evaporated altogether out of the minds of the ablest men in the dominant race of those days, or reduced itself to some "indefinite principle of order," or to some indiscoverable and helpless "soul of the universe." Occasionally gods were imported from other countries, or imperial children were promoted to that rank by the secular power; and all of them, strangers to most of the virtues, were invested in more than due proportion with the worst of human vices. To call the Christian conception of God an improvement upon such a state of things, is to use a phrase that is far too weak for its purpose. A Person, almighty, so absolutely holy that a defect in His holiness is inconceivable, ruling the world and the lives of men in righteousness, loving men and in every wise way of helpful grace leading them into holiness—outside Judaism, no such conception can be found in antiquity; and inside Judaism, that conception was encumbered by a burden of impossible ritual and sacrifice. A Father, infusing a divine element into the spirit of man, by means of which human nature is purified and man is lifted up to God,—how the early Christian thinkers, and even some thinkers who were not Christian, welcomed that conception, inexhaustible alike in its suggestiveness of thought and in its stimulation of hope! And

the scholars of Christ are still learning, working up His lessons into a philosophy that satisfies the exacting human reason, carrying the lines of sure knowledge farther and farther into the fringe of mystery about the Christian creed, receiving into their minds truths about God and combinations of truths that prove fit to live by. Intellectually, therefore, according to the elementary laws of progress, the time is hastening on, when, looking into men's thoughts, the Saviour "shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied."

2. The next question is, Whether, in regard to matters of social progress and the amelioration of the race, Christianity is a failure? It must be confessed that there are some places in the world from which it has been driven back, and in which it has now practically ceased to be. The eastern and the southern seaboard of the Mediterranean, the very countries to which the geography of the New Testament is almost confined,—Christianity must almost be said to have withdrawn from these lands, and even Palestine itself has become a sphere for missionary work which the churches are not too eager to occupy. But the transference of opportunity and grace is so far from being a symptom of the baffling of Christianity, that it is one of the most memorable of its methods of progress. "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place," is the word of the Lord to every recreant church. A modern writer,<sup>1</sup> discussing not too favourably the Pauline scheme of redemption, describes as one of the noblest conclusions of religious philosophy the apostle's position, "that God is not defeated by the inefficacy of His laws and the corruption of mankind, but will turn them to account in issues of transcendent good" elsewhere. Accordingly, one age or country

<sup>1</sup> Martineau, *Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 486.



may be said to reveal the purpose of God in its frustration, another in its accomplishment, and another in its sequel; and when from some point in the remote future one can look back upon all the ages and abroad upon all the lands, he will be able to trace the steady advance of the hosts of the Lord.

That such an advance will take place, and is taking place, seems to have become, with a few exceptions and an occasional note of warning, the great conviction and hope of the present day. One class of men delight to tell us how, in the organic world, a higher type of being has risen again and again from a lower, and the main course of development has been ever upwards, so that man himself is becoming an ever more capable and more highly-organised animal. Others take us to history, and collect all their strong words to describe the condition of the age into which Christ was born. It was, says one, "an age of portentous moral corruption, fostering every shameless licence, permitting every cruelty, rewarding every crime which law and right are constituted to prevent." Nor was there any obvious or expected remedy; for "the gods had become a fable, the temples a trade, and their expiations a pretence, so that the earth seemed cut off from all higher life, and doomed to nurse its own fever and infuriate its own delirium, deserted by all who could heal or pity." Into that world Christianity came. Immediately it rekindled hope in the spirit of the men it touched. It purified language, and made it speak of virtues that were unknown before. It lifted up immeasurably the ideal of what was morally possible to man, and taught how that ideal might be reached and exhausted. It made men feel the abiding presence with them of a God, whose Spirit must not be grieved by sin, whose smallest

wish is absolute law. And the result has been that it would be impossible to find any age in the past that can be compared at all with the present, in respect of the force that attaches to religious conceptions, or of the confidence with which the primary moral distinctions are appealed to and respected.

Or, leaving science and history, it may be said without hesitation, that the idea in regard to society now most prevalent in the mind of man is that of progress. That idea can be traced through political controversy, underlies much modern legislation, is one source of the enthusiasm for education, and is leading men to suggest or to make experiments in almost every direction in the reorganisation of trade and labour and social relationships. Everywhere men seem to believe that they have not to be contented with the world as they find it, but to try in some way to improve it, in the adjustments of its parts and powers, in the adequacy of its functions or in its faithfulness to them. In their dreams they revel in the imaginations of a progress that is uninterrupted; in their more sober moods they admit the possibility of blunders and lapses, of periods of exhaustion or decline. But they persist in conceiving society, not as a finished masterpiece, but as a living and growing organism, —a tree, whose leaves fall in their season, but whose roots “feed upon the very decay they make, and whose branches answer with a fuller foliage to every vernal wind.” Whence did they obtain that conception? It is difficult to suggest any other adequate source than the Spirit or the Word of God. For the idea is that of this old prophet, put into modern phraseology,—an idea that fills the Bible from beginning to end. Instead therefore of Christianity proving a social failure, it has already made the world in its Christian

areas an infinitely better place to live in, and so affected the thought and heart of men, that they have appropriated its hopes, and are beginning at least to attach supreme value to its methods. It is not easy in consequence to find sufficient ground for despondency as to the future on the part of a Christian. For whilst there is substantial agreement everywhere that the race is advancing towards perfection, and some men are busying themselves in all sorts of tentative ways with a view to expedite or to direct its progress, Christians should remember that they have access to the great Cause of it all in the loving Person of the Saviour, and that, its conditions being pre-eminently spiritual, they have actually in their hands the means by which it will most certainly be effected. Christ travailed for the salvation of the race, and is gradually winning the hearts of the men for whom He died. If His disciples are only faithful to their opportunities, and spread around them everywhere, as they best can, the knowledge of Him, before very long "He will see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied."

3. The private fear, that Christianity or religion may prove a failure as far as we ourselves are concerned, is natural enough, due to the ease with which the holiest aspirations are neglected, and to the weight of the "body of sin" that men have to carry about with them. But it is even more groundless than natural. The Saviour is now enthroned and glorified, "expecting till His enemies be made His footstool"; and one thing that cannot be imagined is that He ever has to turn to the Father in protest: "After My travail and death, is this penitent sinner to be rejected? this man, struggling with his faults of temper, with the sin that is around him and in him, to be worsted?" The cross of Christ is not more certain than the pardon of every one

who comes to God through Him, than the perfecting of those who, through weakness and pain and mystery, cleave in devotion to Him. It is His own word, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth"; and neither the promises nor the purposes of the Saviour are open to breach.

There is one word in this verse which is especially rich in comfort and in appeal. Very few passages can be found in the Bible in which God is represented as satisfied with what He sees man to be morally, or in which a godly man is represented as satisfied with what he perceives himself to be. Of the latter the best instance occurs in one of the Psalms, where, however, the emotion is not reached until after death: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness." It seems to imply that, as long as a man lives, he will have some fault to find with himself, weaknesses, and immaturities, and aptitudes to sin that will dispose him to think, in times of temptation, that there are limits to the power of faith and to the efficacy of the grace of God. But clinging to his Saviour,—all through life that must be persistently done,—clinging to his Saviour, when he dies, all these miseries will fall away from him for ever; and at last the sinner and the Saviour will both be satisfied, the one with the completed work of divine grace, the Other with the perfect result of the travail of His soul.

But even now we are to live in such a way that, when Christ looks down upon us and searches heart and motive, He is satisfied with what He sees. A worthier aim, or one to which a man can be more closely bound by gratitude and wisdom, there cannot be. Nor can there be a much better test for practical use in the temptations of daily life, at times when prompt decision of duty is necessary, or when

temper has to be disciplined in the presence of strong incentives. The man who habitually asks, "With this feeling, motive, act, will my Saviour be satisfied?" and who regulates his life accordingly, will not often or seriously sin ; but between him and his Lord there will rapidly grow up a blessed communion, the terms of which will be pleasing to God, sanctifying to the man.

If we have hitherto made the travail of no effect through our neglect of Christ, the teaching of the verse bears upon us in another way. That Christ suffered and died for us, is the lesson of the whole context: "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and with His stripes we are healed." Faith in Him has in every age proved effectual in securing for men forgiveness and spiritual power. The rejection of such a method of universal success cannot be a reasonable course, but must result in further entanglement with evil. But that is not all. The cause of Christ is evidently winning its way in the world, and destined to win ; and therefore it cannot be altogether safe for men to hold themselves aloof from it in negligence or in disdain. Year after year, almost all the world over, the tide of Christianity is steadily rising, wave after wave. Every conceivable effort has been made to check and reverse it. Sometimes, just as on the seashore, the following waves do not always come quite up to the waterline of their predecessor, until, as though impatient, the mighty tide gathers itself together, and rolls its waters beyond the utmost limit of the past. A tide that is ever flowing onwards, with no permanent retreat and no long intervals of ebb, that simply sweeps over the hindrances it finds in its way,—a man has no other choice than either to be overwhelmed by it, or to be carried on its bosom up to God. He who chooses the latter, refusing to let Christ

spend upon him the travail of His soul without response, will be forgiven, strengthened against sin, in due time satisfied with what the grace of God has made of him, throughout eternity part of the cause of the satisfaction that will fill his Saviour's soul.

V

## Quietness and Hope





## QUIETNESS AND HOPE

It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.—LAM. iii. 26.

THAT is a general statement of universal application, and therefore it makes but little difference by whom, or under what circumstances, it was written. An old tradition, which must be taken as representing the belief of the earliest translators of the book, describes it as a lamentation of Jeremiah over Jerusalem. A modern commentator is prepared to speak as positively to an opposite effect, and confidently writes: Through this little book "we are introduced to three writers—one is the author of chapters one, two, and four; a second, of chapter three; and a third, of chapter five." On the ground principally of the artificial form in which these poems are cast, he postpones their composition until after time had mitigated the first bitterness of the conquest of Jerusalem, and entitles them, "Lamentations of the Sons (or Disciples) of Jeremiah." It is an interesting controversy, which must be settled mainly on technical grounds, and which does not affect in the slightest the permanent value of these verses. Whether it was Jeremiah himself after he had taken a refuge in a grotto near the Damascus gate of Jerusalem, or as he stood over against the city in an attitude of grief which a great artist has immortalised, or a godly man of the next generation,

who poured out this dirge over the miseries of his country, it makes very little difference in regard to the abiding value of the words, and therefore also to their ever-recurring usefulness. They come from a very remote past, stamped with the finger of God; and they contain a bit of wisdom, in favour of which might be quoted probably the whole experience of our race.

That the man who wrote them was at the time, and had long been, in grievous trouble and perplexity, is evident enough from the immediate context. It would, however, be a great mistake to regard him, according to a common opinion, as beaten down by his trouble and hopelessly overwhelmed. For whilst on the one hand he speaks of himself as "filled with bitterness" and "drunken with wormwood," as not consumed only because of "the Lord's mercies," on the other he can see in the future, drawing ever more near, a deliverance that was complete and certain. Accordingly he introduces into the midst of his complaints some unhesitating little verses: "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him." Good therefore it is that a man (girt round with difficulties, however numerous—his country wrecked, his home broken up, his most cherished hopes doomed apparently to utter disappointment—even then, or in whatever worse plight he may be imagined to be), "it is good that he should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

I. Apart from the actual contents of such a statement, beneath it and running through it there is clearly implied an intense conviction that God rules this world, and that He rules it in the interests of righteousness. In verses like

the 37th and the 64th, such a conviction finds vigorous expression: "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? . . . Thou wilt render unto them a recompence, O Lord, according to the work of their hands." Passages of such a kind are common enough in Scripture; but it is doubtful whether the truths they contain have ever been more fully believed, or more stoutly asserted, or more diligently used in their application to his own heart, than by Jeremiah. And it is still true that, in order to bear mystery and sorrow in peace and without any serious disturbance of thought or spirit, a man cannot do better than cling to these fundamental truths. In some quarters there is said to be a disposition, that is becoming fashionable, to question them. To the man who has wasted his higher nature in trifling or in worldly absorption, He seems sometimes "but a cloud and a smoke Who once was a pillar of fire," and there are instances which show it to be possible for parts of the mind to become so atrophied through disuse, that God appears at the best but "the guess of a worm in the dust." But fortunate are the men who have not been led either by dainty poetry or by onesided study into such a manner of thinking. Nature in some of her moods will have made most men feel, in the certainty of her processes, the inerrancy with which her life unfolds in ever higher forms of fitness and beauty, that—

The whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

History, too, if it reveals anything, reveals the throne of God above the nations, and methods of government by which in the longrun righteousness is always vindicated. And unless conscience is to be regarded as inexplicable, a haunt-

ing mystery whose immortal sanctions are simply meaningless, there must be in this world, and over it, a living and active God, the primary source of all pure morals, whose rule in everything makes for righteousness. It is not possible, indeed, always to see that such is the case. For human experience is full of discords—one man suffering apparently for another's sins, the sentence against an evil work executed seemingly neither speedily nor sometimes at all, goodness and not iniquity crowned with thorns. Occasionally all that men can do, in the assaults of doubt to which they are inclined to give no place, is to cry unto God with the prophet, "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour," and then the old assurance comes back, solving all difficulties, charming every doubt away: "That the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Therefore "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him."

2. It is not difficult to determine the effect upon the feelings and state of heart that ought in reason to follow this conviction and to be produced by it. Here is a God whose rule is righteous, so absolutely righteous that under His rule men always reap the fruit of their own ways. Just as, therefore, disaster must overtake the wicked, salvation must come to the God-fearing man. Again, therefore, he may venture to regard it as certain, and, however unlikely it seems, to hope and quietly to wait for it. What particular form the salvation assumes is of little importance, provided it is one which relates to the real interests of the soul. It may be the opening of some door in heaven, so that we can see the King in His beauty, after a dark period of

ponderings and doubts ; or the passing away of the clouds of trouble and care, that the clear light may shine down upon us ; or, perhaps, best of all, the falling off from us for ever of weaknesses and faults, that have made our completest triumph over sin in the past only a partial victory. If we are serving God, living honestly in His fear, the salvation is certain ; despondency in regard to it is out of place ; the only reasonable course is to hope for it, with the confidence that it will come, though the difficulties in its way seem insuperable, with the unclouded assurance that it is coming. That is not a condition of feeling which it is easy steadily to maintain. Only too often all appearances seem to be against us ; and the depression into which it is almost our nature to sink is apt to settle down upon us, and to wrap us round with its "pall of despair." David knew the experience well, and there is no truer wisdom than that which receives triple utterance in one of his Psalms : "Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? and why art thou disquieted within me ?" Again and yet again, in the presence of the Most High, he repeats to himself that question, wondering at the dulness that would not leave his soul, though it was panting after God. But in the injunction which he lays upon himself, and the expectation with which he confronts the issues of the future, there is no faltering : "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God." Hope of God's salvation, persistent and indestructible hope—no God-fearing man can do better than entertain and cherish that.

3. But this important little word "quietly" must not be overlooked. There are some qualities or possible accompaniments of hope that altogether spoil it, and make it anything rather than a minister to comfort and salvation. Of these

undesirable companions, the worst are perhaps impatience and suspense, for indifference, as being almost the negation of hope and fatal to vigour, need not be considered. Impatient hope, weary of slow process and gradual growth, eager to grasp the prize before it has been fairly earned, and to pluck the fruit before the sun and the showers have had time to ripen it—it is met with often enough in the ordinary life of the home, and the school, and the business, often enough in the sphere of personal religion. Most Christians will have found themselves disposed now and again to complain that the influences of grace have not more quickly perfected them, that the first brief prayer has not been followed by the flight of every temptation. The divine rule is, alike for peace and for progress in religion, “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him”; and so far wrong and weakening is the eagerness which loses its tension in the presence of difficulty or of delay, that in the New Testament an inspired writer tells us, “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might inherit the promises.” But frequently, especially in cases of certain temperaments, and in times of sickness or fatigue, the tendency is to drift to the other extreme; and instead of all the forces of the nature being gathered up into excitement and over-eagerness, our spirits are torn by a ceaseless alternation of hope and fear, and the suspense induces a disquietude that is sometimes almost unbearable. There are times in life when such an experience cannot perhaps be avoided—when a friend is wrestling with fever in its crisis, when the turning-point in a life’s whole career is manifestly at hand. On such occasions it may be wise to restrain anxiety, and manly to conceal it, but it would be other than human not to feel it. In personal religion however, after at least the soul has

passed through the agonies of penitence into peace, there is no room for suspense. God's care for His people, His effective interference for their protection and safety, the completion of the work that is being done by His sanctifying Spirit,—these things, as far as the operation of His grace is concerned, do not admit of any doubt. They are as certain as the word of God, guaranteed with every pledge of faithfulness, and therefore to be counted as fixed and sure, and throughout all the changes of life simply to be hoped for, to be looked for, to be enjoyed.

Something of that kind seems to be the prophet's meaning, when he bids us "hope quietly." That is to say, in our hope there must not be either the eagerness that breaks up repose, or the suspense that prohibits it. No one will imagine that the word may be taken as denoting the quietness of carelessness or cynicism, which, instead of leading to salvation, is about the most insuperable hindrance to it. That kind of quietness means, as far as thought is concerned, the gradual evaporation of all deep conviction; and, as far as life is concerned, the exhaustion of all spiritual resources, and at last the drying-up and almost the death of the spirit itself. "Hope quietly"—that is, without any excitement and with full confidence of success. The salvation of the Lord is certain; and accordingly the prophet bids us treat it as certain, not worry or make a noise about our difficulties, but go steadily on day after day, doing our duty, making the best of our troubles, strangers to fear.

4. That, says the prophet, is "good" for a man—which word, in his usage, which is not unlike the modern ethical usage, denotes the blessed combination of dutifulness and personal satisfaction. His statement hardly admits of denial. To have assured convictions that the future will be much

better than the present, and, keeping that future in our thoughts, to live dutifully and in peace amidst all perplexities and all possible miseries, is, according to the whole world's consent, one of the principal constituents of a strong character; and many of the poets and moralists are ready to pour upon it almost unlimited praise. Tennyson, for instance, personifies something like it, and thus pictures its goodness:—

She reels not in the storm of warring words;  
She brightens at the clash of yes and no;  
She sees the best that glimmers through the worst;  
She feels the sun is hid but for a night;  
She spies the summer through the winter bud;  
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls;  
She hears the lark within the songless egg;  
She finds the fountain where they wailed "Mirage."

So correct is the statement when the matter is viewed from a Christian standpoint, that it has sometimes even been urged as an objection to Christianity that it lays too much stress upon and makes too much of personal happiness. When that objection is raised against the ethical teaching of Christianity, the answer is obvious, that Christianity does not make personal happiness the chief motive to a Christian life, but rather its necessary accompaniment and result. For it does not seem to be possible for a Christian man, if his religion is invested with its proper control over his thoughts and heart, to be otherwise than happy. In this verse almost every phrase implies the possession of some main element of happiness. He who hopes "quietly for the salvation of the Lord" will be tranquil in spirit, exercising self-control, will have the sense of security and the knowledge that a God is caring for him and is gradually disciplining him into Godlikeness; and it is no wonder the



prophet pronounced that to be good for a man. Richer, fuller happiness a man can hardly expect to meet with on this side of the grave.

II. 1. Jeremiah did not feel any necessity to limit and qualify his advice, or to exclude any section of a sincere life from its application. It sets forth therefore the attitude which a Christian man may venture to maintain uniformly towards matters that may be a source of perplexity to all, and also towards those which only his own temperament or his own tendencies of thought make alarming. Not least of all does it apply to the controversies concerning church and faith, scripture and doctrine, which because of their complexity are apt to be invested with needless terrors, and because of their connexion with personal religion seem sometimes to threaten and imperil the most sacred convictions. In dealing with these many good methods have been suggested, which are capable of being systematised. The first thing to do is to estimate the difficulties at their real value, and to take care that they are not in thought exaggerated. A foot-rule is a good instrument for reducing the proportions of what the fancy makes formidable; and terror is more congenial with the mental haze in which outlines are indefinite, than with the precision which is the first condition of accurate inference. We are often told, for instance, that the present age is characterised by mental unrest and disquiet: a careful observer of human life maintains that it would be more correct to say that it is characterised by rawness of nerves. The tendency is to imagine that every fresh incident is about to alter the course of human society; and that tendency can be traced in almost every department of human interests. That "the bye-election now taking place in some remote constituency

will be such a revelation of public opinion as will shake the Ministry from its seat," has a familiar sound. Many a new book has been confidently proclaimed as marking an epoch in literature, many a change of tariff or of taste as fatal to an industry; whilst, if an impulsive and brilliant man makes an intemperate speech, some of his disciples begin to anticipate, some of the tremulous to fear, a reversal of beliefs and habits through a whole stratum of society. But the world moves slowly, even steadily as a rule and stolidly; and instead of the predicted changes taking place, some fresh spasm of excitement occurs, and much the same things are said over again about the next novelties in oratory or electioneering. In relation to matters of religious doctrine and organisation, there is sometimes a similar circle of incidents: first, the inflated statement; then, the trepidation and the shouts of triumph; and then, the old beliefs emerge unaltered from the confusion, and hardly "the smell of the fire" can be discovered upon them. A great archbishop is said to have stated, upon one occasion, that ever since he had been a boy the Church had been going through a crisis; and his successor, in quoting the remark, added that it "went through a crisis a year," so that there had for long been and still was "a reign of crises." Hardly a month passes without some little ecclesiastical proposal being seriously put forth as a "new departure," without some difficulty in the statement of doctrine being represented as either worse than anything that had preceded it, or even likely finally to close the ages of faith.

The first necessity is to thin down these curious opinions by the removal of the various elements of exaggeration. The popularity of the opinions, at present perhaps more generally current than in any previous age, is due in all

probability on the one hand to the modern growth of literature, and on the other to the extension of interest in the discussion of whatever relates in any way to personal religion. For theology and the inner politics of the Church have ceased to be the property of experts, and are claimed occasionally even by the secular press; and almost everybody is ready to express his own opinions about them freely, and to welcome, if not always to weigh, the expression by other people of their opinions. Half a century ago the world does not seem to have been much interested in the doubter, and his doubts had chiefly to be suppressed; but now it is almost fashionable for a man to have little hesitations of his own, to look at religious truths in a way of his own, to be fertile of suggestions, to regard religious certainty as attainable (if at all) only by following his own processes of thought and adopting his conclusions. It is not altogether ill that such a change has taken place in public sentiments concerning religion. That men should bring their real thoughts to the light, and say openly what they disbelieve, and why; that Christians should be invited to examine on every side the bases of their beliefs, and should learn to give a reason for the faith that is in them,—a time when opinions clash, when the wrong is put into words and can be demonstrated as wrong, is better for the truth's sake, and better in the interests of righteousness, than a time of concealment and languor, when convictions are apt to become flabby, and even the conscience itself to be drugged with insincerity.

With respect to the unexaggerated difficulties in doctrine or in organisation that do exist, such questions as those of inspiration, of the authorship of various parts of the Old Testament and its bearing upon the authority of the New, of the relationships of the churches and the methods of

worship, this verse prescribes the way in which we should regard them—not shut our eyes to their existence, or be frightened at them, but “hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” The wisdom of such a method has been shown again and again. Not very long ago, the fourth Gospel must have seemed to Christians in some of their moods to have been losing amidst the assaults of men not only its sanctity but even its historical truthfulness; and had that process continued, Christianity would have had to part with the sweetest of its records and to pass into the class of “things that can be shaken.” But to-day the assault has practically died out; and it is not an over-statement of the fact to say, that the right of the Gospel to a place in the canon of Scripture has been sufficiently vindicated. Still more recently the world was beginning to accept a theory that seemed at first to make the presence of God unnecessary. To-day that theory within its proper limitations is held more widely than ever before, and yet the majority of its adherents themselves maintain that the theory itself involves the existence of God as indispensable, whilst many of them find it also harmonize completely with a vigorous trust in the unsleeping providence of God. To our present difficulties a similar issue is guaranteed by history and by reason, inasmuch as every truth is a reflection of the mind of that great God who is our Salvation. It is possible to let ourselves become dismayed at the slowness and apparent confusion of the process of perfecting in our minds the adjustment of the truths. But since God Himself presides over that process, it is a better way to “hope and quietly wait for the” intellectual “salvation of the Lord.”

2. With the political and social problems of the day, the cares of enterprise, and of children and home, the perpetual

disappointments and troubles that are crowded into every man's life, the same rule holds good, that Christian men should not worry, or despond, or doubt, but remember the throne of God over all and quietly wait for His salvation. If obedience to that rule is not always easy, it is always reasonable and a blessed ministry of strength and peace. Hezekiah once trembled before Rab-shakeh, and in his trembling sent word to the prophet, "This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy"; and very quickly the reply came, "Thus saith the Lord, The king of Assyria shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land. . . . By the way that he came, by the same shall he return . . . for I will defend the city, to save it." The next morning the camp of the Assyrians was all strewn with the God-smitten and the dead. Joseph in his prosperity, next to the king in rank, practically the ruler of about the greatest empire of antiquity, said to his brethren concerning the cruelty they had wrought upon him, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." What was true of Hezekiah and of Joseph, is true of men's homes and men's countries still. In all the miseries that come to us otherwise than through sin, around us are the encamped hosts of that God who is our Father, and before us is a bright future of safety and peace, to which He is leading us. Few troubles continue unendurable, when a man knows that through them the grace of God will be with him, and that after them will come such a blessed and permanent reversal of experience as will more than compensate for all. "Think of that," says this careworn and disappointed prophet, the most afflicted man of his day, "Hope and quietly wait for it."

The New Testament lifts up this word "salvation" into a sphere of meaning, which perhaps the prophet did not intend, but in which his words are yet equally true. Many a man has asked himself, "Can I be saved, in the sense not merely of forgiveness, but of being made actually holy, patient, and pure?" and it is not unlikely that the question has been asked with more than a small degree of suspicion and doubt. Years of struggle with sin pass by, and leave it still inveterate and indwelling; and after all the efforts and discipline, the best that we can conscientiously say about ourselves is that we are altogether faulty, apt to shrink from duty, irresolute in godly purpose, and wayward in affection, sometimes tempted to despair of anything better. There are two things implied in this verse which ought to turn despair into confident assurance. It implies that throughout the struggle with sin the sustaining grace of God will be with us, and it implies that He will give us victory and completed salvation in the end. That being so, the only reasonable course is to silence the whispers of fear, and quietly to wait through the process of discipline and perfecting, trustfully hoping until, washed in the blood of the Lamb, and clad with every virtue in its vigour, we are meet for the inheritance of the saints and for the fellowship of the Lord.

VI

The Relation of the Will to Character  
and Destiny





## THE RELATION OF THE WILL TO CHARACTER AND DESTINY

The vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.—JER. xviii. 4.

THE figure of the potter is of frequent occurrence in Scripture; and its meaning is the more easily understood, because there is scarcely any craft of which the principal tools have been less altered in the lapse of the centuries. There have been introduced new mixtures of clay, and new modes of mixing it, new kilns, new colouring matters, and new shapes, not always an improvement upon the old. But the potter's wheel is a survival and relic of the most remote antiquity, and to-day, in its essential parts, is of much the same construction as that used by the Babylonians in the valley of the Euphrates, and by the Egyptians on the banks of the Nile.

The purposes for which the figure is used in the Bible are by no means identical. If the more minute modifications are overlooked, its usages may be arranged under two chief heads. In every case the power of the potter over the clay is emphasised. But while some passages stop with that fact,—that the potter's power is absolute, without measure or limit, that he can do what he likes with the clay,—others teach distinctly that the potter is not ruled by his fancy or

caprice, or by any momentary or arbitrary impulse, but the exercise of his power is itself determined by something, some quality or fitness, within the clay.

Of these two lessons, the former is most frequent in Isaiah and in Paul, although other writers adopt or enforce it. Job, for instance, in one place (x. 8-13), appeals in his complaint to his Maker to avoid what looked almost like the stultification of His own plans: "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet Thou dost destroy me. Remember, I beseech Thee, that Thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt Thou bring me into dust again?" But Isaiah very frequently recurs to this truth, in both parts of his prophecy, sometimes as a plea with God for grace, and sometimes as a plea with man for modesty. In one place (lxiv. 8) he prays, "Now, O Lord, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou our potter; and we all are the work of Thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, neither remember iniquity for ever." Elsewhere (xlv. 9) he denounces the human pride that sets itself up against God: "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?" Or, as he puts it in another context (xxix. 16): "Ye turn things upside down! Shall the potter be counted as clay; that the thing made should say of him that made it, He made me not; or the thing framed say of him that framed it, He hath no understanding?" In the New Testament, when St. Paul wanted to show the folly of man's disputing with God or sitting in judgment upon Him, it was this symbol that occurred to him as best suggesting it, and he wrote: "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay,

of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?" That is the most obvious meaning of the figure, to be found in almost every literature, never to be forgotten by the reverent—the potter has complete command over the clay. Sitting at his frame, he can do with it what he likes; and, as the fancy takes him, can mould a pitcher or a rose-bowl. No one can dispute the completeness of his control. He, at his wheel, is the symbol of power: the clay, of helplessness and necessary submission.

There has probably never been a man who believed that more thoroughly than did Jeremiah. He does not, indeed, so completely as other writers appropriate this figure to the expression of such a belief, because he wants it for another purpose; but it would be difficult to find anywhere in religious records a more unqualified setting forth of Jehovah's absolute rights over man, or of the necessity that man must yield, and submit, and obey, than in some paragraphs of his prophecies. In this very chapter he represents God as saying to the house of Israel, "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand." Nor is the power of the Almighty, in its appointment of vocations, in its imperial functions of decision and control, confined in its exercise to communities or groups of men, and heedless of the individual. In his account of his own call, the prophet describes a divine voice as speaking to him: "Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." From that mission he shrinks, in the consciousness of complete unfitness: "Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child." But the voice continues in the quiet tones of authority, accepting no protest, permitting no denial: "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee, thou

shalt speak." In that mission he was so far from having pleasure or cherishing hope, that he felt his life to be "consumed with shame," his birth to have been for himself a mistake, and the day that witnessed it a day to be cursed. Once he ventures even to complain, "O Lord, Thou hast deceived (enticed, spoken persuasively to) me, and I was deceived;" and yet he immediately adds, "Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed." A querulous man, disposed, perhaps, to magnify his hindrances and to talk of his failures and fears, he seems at times to have regarded his duty to God with reluctance, and yet scarcely to have even imagined that it was possible for him to leave it undone. The use that God was making of him was unwelcome, sometimes hardly tolerable; but he never hesitates in his ascription to God of the right and power of complete control over man, or to man of the necessity of submission and the obligation of obedience.

But, according to Jeremiah, that is not a complete account of the relation, either of God to man, or of man to God. And in this chapter he uses the figure of the potter to show, on the one hand, that the potter's power is not exercised arbitrarily, and on the other, that its exercise is determined, and even in some sense conditioned, by the clay itself. That truth, on its two sides, is the principal lesson of this paragraph, suggested by its symbolism, and receiving more direct and forcible utterance as the figure fails to restrain the prophet's jealousy for God and indignation against sin.

1. With regard to the figure, it is in the particulars of the fourth verse that Jeremiah's use of it differs from that of most other scriptural writers. Bidden by God, he goes down to a potter's workshop, possibly in the valley of Hinnom, where clay seems to have been worked from time immemorial.

There he saw a vessel that was being made, "marred in the hand of the potter." It is not an unfamiliar occurrence. Sometimes the fault is the potter's, due to such causes as the presence of grit on the fingers, the selection of insufficient clay, or a lack of skill in revolving the wheel; and sometimes the cause is in the clay itself, which has not been washed and kneaded to uniform consistency and fineness. Here the whole of the context shows that the last-named cause alone was contemplated by the prophet and by the Spirit who inspired him. And as soon as the potter saw that the clay he was dealing with would not answer the purpose he had in view, with a slight touch of his hand he crushed it down into a shapeless heap of mud, began anew, and made it into "another vessel." In other words, the potter's treatment of the clay depends upon his knowledge or discovery of its qualities, its capability, or its faultiness. Or, dropping the figure, God does not always act upon and complete His first apparent design with a man; and any change of design on His part is determined by some adequate cause, which is always to be found in the man himself—in the way in which he exercises his freedom of will, or in the attitude in which he puts himself towards conscience, and duty, and truth. There has sometimes been a disposition, amongst nations and amongst individuals, to imagine that some moral character had been stamped indelibly upon them by God, and was permanent and unalterable, whatever they did. So far was Jeremiah from believing that, and so far is the Bible from teaching it, that it represents man's will as in a sense entrusted with the supreme control over his spirit and over his destiny. A philosopher, who is praised by others as characterised by "unswerving fidelity to experience," reminds us that whilst, in relation to event and circumstance

and all the external history of life, the maxim holds good that "Man proposes, but God disposes," that maxim has to be reversed in relation to morality, and in the whole sphere of conscience, wherever the growth or decline of the spirit itself is concerned, it is true that "God proposes, but man disposes." The plastic skill and power of the great Potter, in themselves immeasurable and without limit, are yet not applied arbitrarily, under the impulse of fancy or caprice, but depend at least for their direction upon the clay itself.

2. That truth is sometimes overlooked, or qualified, or even rejected. Some of the current philosophies deny it in theory, but, when pressed, will reluctantly acknowledge that consciousness can be quoted in its favour, or, as the greatest English psychologist of the day puts it, "The assumption of the freedom of the will is in a certain sense inevitable to any one exercising rational choice." In the Old Testament it is an especial favourite of Jeremiah's, though not confined to him; and in this single paragraph he is not contented with the dubious form it assumes in the figure, but recurs to it once and again afterwards. The fourteenth verse, which is unintelligible enough in the Authorised Version, and shows traces in the italics of the text and in the margin of the trouble it gave the translators, is thus rendered by the Revisers: "Shall the snow of Lebanon fail from the rock of the field, or shall the cold waters that flow down from afar be dried up?" When that is compared with the preceding verse, it becomes evident that the prophet wanted to point a contrast between the steadfastness of the phenomena and laws of nature, and the apparent fickleness of those of morals. To the one the eternal will of God which knows no change is central; to the other, the uncertain will of man. And hence, "the virgin of Israel" can manage sometimes to

do "a very horrible thing"; though the snow of Lebanon never fails, and the springs that it feeds are never dry. That indeed is almost the sole use that Jeremiah makes of illustrations from nature throughout his prophecy. Whenever he refers to it, almost without exception, he is thinking of its constancy and consistency and unbroken order. It is he who writes of the rain, "the former and the latter," that comes each "in its season," and of "the appointed weeks of harvest"; of "the sand that is placed for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it"; of the "stork in the heaven" that "knoweth her appointed times," and "the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow" that "observe the time of their coming." When he wanted a figure of stability capable for use as a pledge of entire certainty, he found it in the most familiar of successions, and represented God as saying, "If ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, so that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant." There is one department of morals, that of consequences and destiny, in which can be traced this same unerring certainty of law; and no one who remembers the famous reference to the skin of the Ethiopian will be likely to forget the tendency of every moral habit to fixedness. But Jeremiah was too wise to base his moral appeals, generally or often, upon the tendencies, and especially the external tendencies and necessary results of conduct, but deserves rather to be singled out amongst the writers of the Old Testament as the prophet of responsibility and free will, fond of teaching that the constraint of God is ever upon the so-called powers of nature, but never in the same sense upon the spirit of man. The forces that seem to play in the cloud-forms and the winds, to move with slow rhythm in the

solid structures of the ages or with quick inapparent catastrophe and explosion, the life that modifies the cell and pulsates in a myriad forms through the universe—all simply fulfil their Sovereign's will; and the only power, not in the same way subject to His rule, but permitted to rebel against Him, and to check and alter His purposes, is that of the personality or will of man. To that extent the Potter renounces His power over the clay, and the clay is allowed to determine the design of the Potter.

3. The same truth is put in a third way in the section shut in by the seventh verse and the tenth,—one of those interesting passages in which the word “repent” occurs upon the lips of Jehovah. Sometimes, as in the early passage which says that “it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart,” the word seems to imply a certain feeling of regret, which it is difficult to harmonize with the qualities that enter necessarily into the conception of a God. In those cases the best that can be said is perhaps that God is accommodating Himself to man, revealing Himself according to human modes of thought and speech. It is difficult to conceive any other condition under which man could attain to the faintest knowledge of the Unknowable. But in this chapter it is not necessary to seek any emotional element in the word, or to take it as denoting anything more than a change of purpose on the part of God in regard to man. “At what instant” (says Jehovah) “I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.” Several of the phrases seem to be introduced for no other reason than to emphasise the possibility of a



change of design and dealing on the part of God, and its contingency upon some change on the part of a nation or of the persons that form it. So on the other hand: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them." The inference evidently is, that neither God's threats nor His promises are absolute, in the sense that they are incapable of diversion or of change. Every word that goes forth from His lips is of necessity law; but the nations, the individuals, are left at liberty to choose which of the words shall govern them, and the occasions of choice are more than one. It appears accordingly that men can actually, by their choice of evil or carelessness concerning right, frustrate God's purposes of grace, just as by penitence and self-reform they can avert a doom that is impending. That is the word of the Lord by others than Jeremiah. "The soul that sinneth" (says Ezekiel, xviii. 20-24) "it shall die. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins . . . and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live . . . And when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, . . . in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." Nor does the New Testament reject such a lesson, which is in accordance further with the teaching of reason and with the fundamental conception of justice. There is no finality in God's design for a man, until the man's will has either frittered itself away, or hardened itself into invincibility. But by the attitude towards God into which men put themselves, they determine the pattern

according to which His methods mould them, and every change of attitude on their part is quickly followed by its appropriate and necessary change of design.

It is sometimes almost possible to see this process of a change in God's purposes taking place in the affairs of nations or in the career of an individual. Whatever nation or person is selected, again and again the figure seems to hold good,—whenever the vessel He is making of clay is marred in the hand of the Potter, He makes it again “another vessel,” according to His complete knowledge of what every variety of clay is best adapted for. The Bible more than once implies, if it does not actually state, that God “repented” of that which He said He would do to the Jews. And whilst through their whole history, when it is taken as a whole, there can be traced one great plan; if the history be taken in its separate periods and generations, it is apt to look a little broken and parti-coloured,—like a geological series, at one point deflected downwards, and not cropping up again until miles have been traversed. Concerning the Ninevites, again, the record is: “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not.” “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” was the proclamation the prophet was charged to make; but because the people “believed God and proclaimed a fast,” He turned from His “fierce anger,” and had even to expostulate with His less clement messenger, “Should not I spare Nineveh?”

Nor is this modification of God's design represented as confined to nations or communities. Jonah himself was called of God to be a prophet, but the action of his own will made him a sacrifice to appease the sea, until, when he

willed better things, God's plan for him changed back again. Adam was made by God in His own likeness, and intended to live in the fellowship of God, and in some way of perfect innocency to reflect and reproduce on the earth the divine glory. But because he exercised his will in sin, the spoilt clay was made into a very different vessel, "the image of God in him defaced, the vision of God obscured, his nature unable to restore itself to the communion which it had lost and for which it longed." In the life of Moses, again, may be found more than one illustration of God's change of design with him; but there is one curious one,<sup>1</sup> of special interest because attention has been drawn to the incident by the opinion of a critic of Judaism, to the effect that the Jews at that period did not regard their God as omnipotent. "It came to pass" (so runs the passage) "by the way in the inn, that the Lord met Moses, and sought to kill him." The narrative adds that, when his wife repaired his neglect and circumcised their son, Jehovah "let him go." How that shows that the Jews in their conception of God limited His power, it belongs to the critic to say; to an ordinary reader it is more likely to appear a not obscure instance of divine doom, about to overtake a disobedient will, averted and escaped by the change of the will into dutifulness. The centuries that have elapsed since then have not altered the methods of the Most High, but in modern lives, our own lives, they still continue. For how easily every one can discover by reflection upon his own life moments in the past when some evident change took place in the plan according to which the life was unfolding! Of such moments that of conversion is the most important, but by no means the only one. There have been periods of restlessness

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aubrey Moore, *Essays Scientific and Philosophical*, p. 211.

followed by periods of peace ; long weeks during which the spirit was torn and in dismay, succeeded by a time when it seemed to rest quietly upon God : perhaps changes of the opposite kind—processes of waste and deterioration that have taken the place of those of spiritual economy and growth ; designs of grace and purity in the past, and now a manifest drifting towards ruin. There is thus cumulative evidence, in Scripture, in history, in human experience, that God does not always act to the end upon His original design for a man, but that His designs are sometimes changed on account of something in the men themselves.

What is that something ? This chapter alone, to say nothing of teaching that abounds elsewhere, leaves no room for doubt. “If that nation turn from their evil,” is laid down with all emphasis in the eighth verse as the one condition upon which the modification of God’s purpose depends ; and the most powerful and essential human factor in every act of moral turning is of necessity the will. In some parts of morals indeed, in the determination of character, of its trend and development, and of the consequences on the part of man that follow, the will may almost be said to be actually supreme. There have been essayists in history, who have delighted to point out, how on the wide stage of social life the whole design of the future seemed to hinge upon some act or choice of the human will. And one of them indulges in the generalisation, “It would seem as if the many-coloured web of history were all woven by the threads of our volition, shot through the continuous warp of natural law without us.”

But it is an even more unquestionable inference, that the responsibility for a man’s character rests substantially, it would be hardly too much to say entirely, upon himself.

It is a terrible responsibility, of which men have tried to rid themselves in many ways ; but so long as human nature remains what it is, free to choose the right or the wrong, it is a responsibility which every man must face and every man must bear. God gives, in the conscience and by His Spirit, a clear revelation of what is right, and in His Son a source of strength that is sufficient for every duty. He gives opportunities, allurements, warnings without number ; and having given those, ceaselessly present with us, His part in the formation of character may be said to be done. The man has then to determine, by the action of his own will, whether the law of perfecting or the law of perdition shall work in him. It is a divine arrangement, most merciful and most wise, administered by God Himself ; and its specific applications are obvious. To those who are living in sin, conscious of it, but not seeing any clear way out, it reveals the reason,—because the will is not fixed upon God ; and as soon as that is surrendered to God in trust and whole-hearted devotion, the sins will quickly cease to trouble us, and the spirit will become familiar with well-doing. Or if we are saddened by the almost constant feeling that we are making next to no progress in religion, fundamentally from the human side it is a matter of will. And he who puts more thorough and abiding purpose into his service of God, will find the grace of God coming to him in larger measure, and one sin after another having to confess itself vanquished. It is indeed a frequent fancy in our dulness, that the will is altogether too weak to be charged with such a responsibility. Paul thought in that way once—“O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body of death ?” and was almost heartbroken until the Spirit of God showed him the means of deliverance — “through Jesus Christ our

Lord." And it is still true that the man who brings his weakness of will and all his moral failures to his Saviour, finds in Him forgiveness, wisdom, power, everything else he needs to brace his spirit and make it pure. Even in Old Testament times, a psalmist once sang, "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears"; and again, "The Lord is my strength and my shield: my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped." That experience repeats itself ever the more readily in the case of a man who really fears God and delights in Him.

VII

**Human Responsibility and Divine Grace**





## HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY AND DIVINE GRACE

Now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?—ISA. v. 3, 4.

It is almost certain that the prophet sang this song "touching the vineyard" in the reign of Ahaz, one of the weakest and most hesitating of the kings of Judah. The imagery and figures of the song would be familiar enough to his audience. Moses was reputed to have used them before the wanderings in the wilderness were over; three prophets and at least one psalmist appropriated them; and so well did they answer the purpose for which they were wanted, that in later times the Jews adopted on their coins the vine-stock as their national symbol, and our Lord in His parables deduced from it some of the sternest lessons He had to teach and some of the tenderest. In one place, He is Himself the vine, and His disciples are the cluster-bearing branches, actually receiving from Him through their vital connexions whatever of grace or strength they need; and in another, the vineyard is His domain, within which service is rigidly exacted and undutifulness meets its fit penalty of death. But it is doubtful whether anywhere else the same lesson is taught by the imagery as in this paragraph. Here the vineyard covers the sides of a conical hill, and lies open

at every point to the sunlight. By nature the soil was "fat" and fruitful, and upon it the cultivator had bestowed every care; "he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine." Tower and winepress, every means of protection and every appliance for the production of a perfect wine, are provided; and nothing is neglected that experience or skill can suggest, or labour accomplish. And the result of it all is complete disappointment for the proprietor: "he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes"—sour, and small, and hardly worth the gathering. The result of that again was the turning of the vineyard into waste,—fence broken down, tower and winepress left to decay, "briers and thorns" allowed to flourish as they pleased. That is evidently the familiar story, that is woven here into song—loving care bestowed ungrudgingly upon something from which it receives less than no return, and then dried up, or diverted, or even transformed into a very formidable kind of justice.

I. In any attempt at the interpretation of the story and the exhibition of its moral and religious uses, its national application should be considered first: "The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts" (says the seventh verse) "is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant." Under the guidance of that verse, some expositors have delighted even to play with the story, and to trace down the comparison into its minuter details. It is a method of speaking familiar in the East, though not commending itself so fully to Western judgment and taste. We are told, for instance, by one of the greatest of exegetes, that the very fruitful hill is Canaan, the gathering out of the stones is the expulsion of the Canaanites, the choice vines are the prophets and kings

of Israel in the early days of the kingdom, Jerusalem is the tower, and the winepress-trough is the temple, where, according to some of the Psalms, "the river of God's pleasures" flows, and quenches the thirst of the soul. But it is perhaps better not to look for these very close and small analogies in the parables of Scripture, unless they are to be treated chiefly as exercises in ingenuity. Following the broader lines of interpretation, there is at least less risk of the error of overlooking the general application in the interest of some little comparison that is imagined to be present.

In this case the application of the story to the Jews generally is obvious at once. There is a sense in which it may almost be said that Israel was Jehovah's vineyard, as no other race or nation has ever been. Selected from an ancient stock which certainly does not seem to have greatly distinguished itself before, it had been preserved and cherished century after century; and in its most marvellous history are to be found the purest revelations of God in antiquity, leading up to the "unspeakable gift" in which men have life. That history proves that the nation had enjoyed every condition of blessedness, every opportunity of fruitfulness and service. Upon it the Most High had, so to speak, concentrated His gifts, if not His favour. Every helpful thing that could be done for it, in the way of instruction or bounty, of discipline or encouragement, of forbearance or gift of resource, had been done. Concerning that, there was no room for doubt, and within Israel itself, as the history of this symbol alone sufficiently shows, not much disposition to question. To an old prophet, after the country had been swept by an invasion that was necessary to turn it from sin, Jehovah seemed still to be saying, "A vineyard of choice wine, I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment;

lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." And a psalmist, referring to an earlier period, sets the people singing, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it: Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land . . . the boughs unto the sea, and the branches unto the river." That Israel had been "planted a noble vine," as Jeremiah says, "wholly a right seed," capable of clothing itself with clusters that should "make glad" the heart of humanity and the heart of God, every page of its earlier history abundantly shows.

2. But that was only the career that was possible to it. The kind of career it chose instead is sufficiently indicated in this fifth chapter, in the latter part of which the vices seem almost to run riot—avarice and self-indulgence, injustice and oppression, and underlying them all that fatal trifling with moral distinctions and that contempt of God which are always a certain sign of advanced moral corruption. But it is even more significant of the state of the nation, that these lurid paragraphs are not perhaps quite an adequate representation. For, threatened with an attack from an alliance of the neighbouring tribes, Ahaz sought the aid of the king of Assyria; and to secure it, he actually consented to govern his country as an Assyrian province. Then followed one of the most dismal periods of Jewish history. The weak king became infatuated with his oppressor, and nothing would satisfy him except the introduction of Assyrian manners and morals and worship into Jerusalem. The example of the court infected the nobles and the priests; and at length, in the beautiful valley of Hinnom, amongst the groves that were kept green by the fountains of Siloah, an altar to Moloch was erected. That was the sort of "wild grape,"

this choice vine was yielding,—idolatry of the most cruel and savage kind, varied with sensuality and the oppression of the poor.

3. That such a result should disappoint the owner of the vineyard was only natural; and accordingly this little story represents him next as trying to find out the cause, or rather, as appealing to the men of Judah to acknowledge what he and they well knew. He sets them up for the moment as judges, and confronts reason and conscience with the question, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" very much as our Lord did, when He told the Pharisees about the husbandmen who killed their master's son instead of sending in the fruit, and asked them to decide, "When the lord of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" But the comparison between the two passages must not be carried too far. Our Lord was emphasising the fact that a vineyard is cultivated for the sake of its produce, no return of fruit in its season making a change of cultivators more than reasonable; whilst in Isaiah's paragraph the conclusion is that, whatever the yield, the owner at least was entirely free from blame, and upon him no vinedresser could charge the result of his own negligence and sloth. Instead of being open to blame, the owner had been lavish of his gifts and care, multiplying both to the utmost degree that his loving purposes would allow. For had God done more than He did for the men of Judah, He would have overborne their freedom with persuasives too strong, and made their virtue mechanical and necessary, that is to say, no virtue at all. Everything that could be done, and yet leave them free to sin and capable of righteousness, had been done. And when the prophet delivered his first message, "Hear, O heavens,

and give ear, O earth ; for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me," the statement was enough to fill heaven and earth with wonder ; but probably not one of the rebellious children was inclined to transfer to God the responsibility and fault of the rebellion. For sin is always a man's own "act and deed," ordered by him or permitted ; and when it is ascribed to force of circumstances or to defect of grace, the sovereign that slumbers within him and the co-ordinate power are forgotten. Let but the will arouse and bestir itself, and it never finds in circumstance anything over which by grace it cannot triumph.

4. A nation convicted and self-convicted of the most gross offences against God and against morals, offences the entire responsibility of which rests upon itself—what will become of that nation ? There are other parts of the Bible, not quite so stern as this, which indicate that further opportunities may be given it, and the final punishment withheld for a time. For it is true that God is long-suffering, not willing that nation or man should perish, endowed with a degree of patience which is about the most marvellous and the most merciful thing in the world. But it is also true that, in regard of nations as well as of men, the patience of God may be exhausted, whereupon that day of wrath breaks, of which the last verse speaks, when the very "light is darkened in the heavens" above them. We have accordingly, in this song and story, the outline of the history of Judah. God's consideration, first of all, with every kind of gracious help and opportunity,—all wasted through the neglect or wilfulness of the nation itself, until it became fruitless and hopelessly corrupt ; and then the fulfilment of the divine words : "Go to ; I will tell you what I will do to

My vineyard: I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." Judah, in its origins and early career, is a sufficient illustration of the preliminary stages: Judah, in its dispersion and miseries, is a standing witness to the certainty with which national calamity overtakes national contempt of God.

For in these respects, as in others, Judah is an example and type for all the nations. Every one of them, ancient or modern, hoary as those that are now entirely handed over to the archæologists, or recent and fluctuating as those that have seemingly given themselves up to experiments in misrule, may be said to have been, or to be, a vineyard of the Lord, tended and cared for by Him with a view to fruitfulness. And if any one of them prove corrupt, the principal causes must be sought within itself in its moral and religious condition, and the consequences are of necessity the collapse of the nation and its removal from the sphere of influence to make room for another. A nation that ignores its past, and just surrenders itself to sin, is manifestly good for nothing, filling no worthy function, but cumbering the earth. Every race that has been prostrated, whether to be lost in a sudden eclipse, or to mingle indistinguishably with others, or in the course of time to rise again through renewed morality into renewed power,—on the one hand it is an evidence of that divine rule of the world, by which righteousness always and everywhere prevails; and on the other it is an appeal to the peoples to remember the reason why they are peoples, and diligently to see to it that sin is never allowed so to cripple them that it becomes necessary for their candlestick also to be removed out of its place.

II. But no national interpretation of this parable seems

quite sufficient. There is indeed a disposition occasionally shown to distinguish between the paragraphs of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament, and to classify some as containing God's word to the individual, and others as applying only to nations, and as involving neither personal appeal nor personal responsibility. It has been argued, for example, that when Jeremiah says expressly that he is delivering God's word concerning a nation, it must not be inferred that the lesson relates in any way to God's dealings with individual men. But such a distinction is not one that it is easy to follow, inasmuch as a nation consists of individual men, and it is chiefly on that ground that it is possible to speak in any adequate sense of the moral responsibility of a nation. Not that a nation is merely a collection of individuals; for there are passages in Scripture that represent God as dealing with it almost as "a living organism," the generations past being bound up with the present one into a unity with a moral character of its own.<sup>1</sup> That moral character may be intensified or modified age after age, by the filling up of "the measure of the fathers," or by the renunciation of the fathers' sins. But yet a nation is a collection of individuals, each alone living before God as the whole lives before Him, each and the whole receiving equal justice at His hands. He never confuses a part with the whole, or forgets the sincerity of the few in His wrath at the sins of the many; but even when a great catastrophe is represented as overtaking a nation, and in some of its miseries every one has to share, there is generally "a remnant according to the election of grace." To Ebed-melech, who had befriended him, Jeremiah (xxxix. 16-18) was sent with the message, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of

<sup>1</sup> Trench, *Notes on the Parables*, p. 211.



Israel; Behold, I will bring My words upon this city for evil, and not for good, and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. . . . But I will surely deliver thee, because thou hast put thy trust in Me." When Jehovah exposed Israel to the triple scourge of Elisha and Jehu and the sword of Hazael, He did not omit to assure the God-fearing of His protection, but added, "Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." The word of the Lord by Zechariah is, "It shall come to pass that in all the land two parts shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein, and I will bring the third part through the fire." And, omitting many similar instances, when Jesus spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth, He spoke of the way in which His Father distinguishes the person from the nation and from the class: "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, . . . but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow: and many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." An ark for the faithful is the natural accompaniment of a flood for the race, and a preliminary to the destruction of Sodom is an opportunity for even Lot to escape.

The way in which the Bible insists upon this truth, that national responsibility does not obliterate, but only gather together and, as it were, organise personal responsibility, has some important bearings upon current modes of speech and thought. There is a disposition sometimes to speak of the conscience of a nation or of a large section of a nation, to imagine that the phrase stands for something that is entirely separate and apart from ourselves, and to regard it as a

power outside of a man, to which he may add or from which he may withhold his own influence. At times it has proved a convenient generalisation; but it is well that an exact meaning should be given it. It must denote, not something apart from any man, but either the average personal conscience, or the aggregate of all the consciences; and an average or an aggregate is a figure upon which every unit tells. Even in the senses in which it has of late been used, as denoting the ideal conscience that should accompany certain convictions, or the aggregate of the consciences of the majority, or of the loud-voiced or the irrepressible, the same conclusion holds good. Upon every man in his measure rests the responsibility for its dulness, or the merit of its loyalty to right. By faithfulness to truth or duty every one can make its claims more imperative and full, just as by languor he can help it to die. All morality indeed must always be, in its essence and in its appeals, personal, lifting up a nation by lifting up the individuals that constitute it, exposing it to the wrath of God because the individuals expose themselves. The most effective social movements are found to be accordingly those which address themselves in the name of God to individuals, and persuade them one by one to aim more resolutely at the fulfilment of righteousness. When therefore this Bible calls upon a nation for justice and truth and honour, it must be appealing to the persons who form the nation, trying to search every heart and to stir every will; or else its methods must be pronounced as unapproved by human experience, and in practice below the best.

1. If then this passage be taken personally, no one who recalls his past life, and remembers the way in which God has dealt with him, is likely to object to its symbolism.

Every one of us has been and is a vineyard of the Lord ; and He does for us all that a God can do. Resources opportunities, health, knowledge, moral insight,—nay, as a psalmist once said, His thoughts to us-ward “are more than can be numbered.” When a man tries to measure the heat or the light that streams out of the sun, or the life that fills the universe with evolving grace and vigour, it is not unwise to add a little to whatever total he may reach. The love of God is “richer than life,” more inexhaustible than the sun, streaming down upon men with no possible interval of eclipse, flooding them with its grace. There are some of the gifts of His love that are more obvious than others,—a beautiful world to live in, with the power to enjoy and in part to understand its beauties ; a daily round of duty, with the privilege of doing it ; the joys of friendship and the joys of solitude ; the incidents of the past and of the present, full of important issues, with the knowledge that a great God is ruling over all in righteousness. There is the patient discipline, by which He has sought to gather the stones out of His vineyard, thwarting evil inclination, checking self-will, strengthening trust amidst the precariousness and all the ambiguities of life. As though that were but little, He has given us His Son to reveal Himself, to meet the necessities of our thoughts, to be an adequate source of inspiration and power, to bear our sins in His own body. He who remembers also how His Spirit has touched our lives at every point, and simply never left us without influence of allurements or of restraint, will feel that His loving care is but feebly expressed in those tender figures of His own : “I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms ; . . . I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.”

2. What has been the result of it all? Concerning every one of us, God has full cause to say, "What could have been done more for him, that I have not done?" It is only reasonable that He should expect us by now to have brought forth some fruit, in character and in service; and there is probably not one of us whose conscience will allow him to suppose that he has brought forth any. Wild grapes in abundance, weakness, and bad temper, and almost every kind of fault, we can show those, but very little else—no perfect virtue, no faith that has forgotten how to falter, no works that have seemed actually to diminish or to restrain the power of evil in the world. Grapes that are luscious and clustering and fit for a banquet of the gods, we have borne none of them; and the temptation is to imagine that no care or skill of culture can produce that kind of fruit in our vineyard.

3. The reason of such failure is not far to seek. That God can be blamed for it, is impossible; for there has been no defect of grace or help on His part. Temperament and circumstance might be pleaded, aptitudes we have inherited and hindrances amidst which we have found ourselves, but for the obvious reply that, whilst these things may involve effort and strain, they never involve defeat. The man who is most embarrassed by his own disposition and surroundings, but for his own fault might be a better man than he is. Consciousness and Scripture both teach that, "whenever the Lord's people are straitened, they are straitened in themselves." For wastefulness and failure and sin are so far from being compulsory, that the will of man is free to renounce them, and the grace of God is given in adequate measure to him who resolves to do so. A Christian who stands outside the richer experiences of his faith, and has

never borne anything that can be called fruit, has no one to blame for it but himself, his own defect of sincerity or purpose or eagerness.

4. The consequences of continuing in fruitlessness are shown by the passage to be fatal and hopeless. "Now go to," saith the Lord; "I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. . . I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns": so that the opportunities and incitements to fruitfulness cease, and the soil passes back out of culture into sterility or the bearing only of weeds. It is one of the most terrible processes in life, the insidious growth of the habit of neglecting God,—in the gradual decline of moral strength, and the gradual exhaustion of the patience of God. To waste divine grace is to run the risk of losing it altogether. The influences of the Holy Spirit appeal and offer themselves, and, if rejected, pass away; and the passing of each is the premonition of the last. Samson at one time found no feat of arms beyond his strength, no condition of peril inextricable; but as he continued to dally with evil, and allowed it to divert him ever more from his duty to God, at last he was led away blind, "bound with fetters of brass," to "grind in the prison-house" of his enemies. Christ in one place (John ix. 39) teaches that they who see may "by the action of forces within them" become blind; and in regard to almost every faculty or gift of man, body or mind or soul, heart or will, there appears to be a point in the career of wastefulness beyond which there is no recovery.

That point, however, has not been reached by any one who retains any aspiration after God, or any desire to be a better man. In Christ there is power for all to shake off every habit of sin, to reverse tendencies to neglect and waste, to

evolve in righteousness and peace. How constantly that is shown in moral changes with which the Church is familiar! A man who has lingered for months in feebleness just within, hardly within, the kingdom of God, bestirs himself to devotion, and matures into a pure spirit whose influence is felt for good on every side of him. The wastefulness of the past God will pardon, if we "seek His face." Then, day by day, as we live to Him loyally (His help will enable us to do it), the Lord of the vineyard will see that the choice vine He has planted is putting on the promise of choice fruit, and by His grace is bearing it. Instead of leaving us and laying us waste, He will support every effort, count with generous eyes the virtues He gives, and at last welcome us made perfect into His own heaven.

VIII

Intercourse with God





## INTERCOURSE WITH GOD

Be careful for nothing, but in everything . . . let your requests be made known unto God.—PHIL. iv. 6.

THIS is one of the almost detached counsels, in which the earlier part of the chapter is very rich, and which seem to have occurred to the apostle in the natural course of letter-writing. He returns from the doctrinal digression of the previous verses, and just puts down one after another, with little connexion between his words beyond what his heart gives them, exhortations and bits of advice which he thought might help his friends to godliness, rising at last to that unrivalled paragraph about contentment—a passage which to sincere men must be a standing marvel and inspiration. Thus, as always with him, doctrine the most sublime and experience the most complete and lofty go together. In the presence of those truths about his Saviour which he has just set forth, he can write with confidence about his power to do all things in Christ, his possession of the peace of God through Christ. This verse belongs to his treatment of the latter theme, and begins with the unexpected and perhaps at first sight not altogether wise or reasonable recommendation, that we should “be careful for nothing.”

I. What does that mean? It is very necessary that the apostle be not misunderstood. That he did not mean what the words alone are exactly equivalent to, “Be careless

about everything," is shown by the nature of the subject concerning which he was writing, as well as by certain distinctions in the usage of words, which rule in our modern speech as thoroughly as in his. "Be careful for nothing": that is, one man may say, Just treat everything as a matter of course, with sheer impassiveness, or indifference, or apathy; never mind what you do yourself, and leave all things to take place and to work out their issues as they please. It is the cynic's theory of human duty, put a little baldly, but a theory distinctly out of place by the side of a promise that the peace of God shall guard our hearts. So far indeed is carelessness of that kind from leading to any degree of peace, that its destiny always sooner or later proves to be a rude awakening which is fatal to peace. For those who exhibit it, the treatment prescribed by the best educational experts and the representatives of every serious school of morals is always a shaking sufficiently rough to rouse them effectually to a sense of obligation and duty. The carelessness that is begotten of dull sensibility or of mental indolence, and that is willing to compromise any truth, to waste opportunity and influence alike, to let the whole world drift—Scripture is uniform in its protest against it, and merely alternates in its rebukes between scorn and righteous anger.

2. There is another interpretation of the phrase that must also be rejected. For there are two kinds of care, so different from one another that it is almost curious that the same term is used for both. There is the care of anxiety and distrust on the one hand, and on the other the care of diligence, characteristic of the accurate scholar or faithful steward, and comprehending such indispensable virtues as forecast, attention, and energy; and not a verse in the Bible can be found to condemn the latter, or to discharge us

from its obligation. The Bible, on the contrary, singles it out for commendation. In this very chapter St. Paul praises the carefulness of the Philippians in that sense, and none the less though it had been baffled and perhaps barren of result. "I rejoice in the Lord greatly" (he writes), "that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again, wherein ye were indeed careful, but ye lacked opportunity." Elsewhere the word occurs again in passages of exceeding beauty or emphasis. "Concerning these things," writes St. Paul with infinite solemnity, when he was within sight of the end of his life, "I will that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they which have believed God may be careful to maintain good works." When Elisha recalled all the great kindness of the woman of Shunem, this was the word that occurred to him as best expressive of it all, and he said to her, "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care: what is to be done for thee?" And in the summary of the law, where every word would be fastidiously chosen and adjusted with exactness, we are told, "The Lord shall greatly bless thee . . . if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the Lord." Carefulness, in the sense of interested attention and effort, and even eagerness—its necessity is insisted upon in the maxims of the market-place, as the rudimentary condition of progress in every department of thought or life; and whatever this verse means, it certainly does not set itself in the teeth of the teaching of common sense and of universal experience.

The carefulness that is to be avoided, most men know only too well. It is called by many names, and capable of many degrees—worry and harassment, apprehension and solicitude, disquiet and foreboding and anxious suspense; but it is questionable whether any man is able to spend

many days without being visited by it in some form, even if he is not occasionally distracted and almost overwhelmed by it for a time. Alike in solitude and in society it is apt to come, sometimes without any obvious cause beyond physical weariness, sometimes the product of the most empty fears. Of the various embitterments of human life, there is probably not one so easily provoked, so frequent in its visits, so abiding in its stay. The question is, What is the best mode, the right mode of dealing with it? The best thing would be to get rid of it once and for ever, bidding it farewell in such a final way that thenceforward no minutest fragment protruded itself into our hearts ; but, unfortunately, that does not seem to be quite possible in this life. The Bible itself appears to proceed upon the assumption that there will be recurring seasons in every life when for the moment care will be felt, and then goes on to teach us what we ought to do with our cares as soon as we become conscious of them, before the spirit begins to sink beneath their burden. As a matter of fact, every man must have found that he cannot get rid of the responsibilities of decision and judgment and action, whatever the degree of Divine help he enjoys ; and that the discharge of those responsibilities involves in its earlier stages an amount of perplexity, sometimes of necessary uncertainty, fruitful in at least some forms of anxiety. In matters of speculative belief, for instance, we have to determine what to accept as true and to try to live by ; and the more conscientiously we do that, the more familiar are we likely to become with mental bewilderment and care. Even if we decline to investigate for ourselves, and appeal to some external authority to dictate to our minds a creed, we must occasionally, one would suppose, be painfully exercised as to the sufficiency of the

grounds of submission to that authority. In practical matters it is often worse still. The interests of our homes, the enterprises of business, the right use of our influence as citizens, the relationships of neighbourhood and friendship and society, all the diverse schemes into which we are drawn or to which of its own accord our energy attaches itself—it would be altogether impracticable teaching, to maintain that a man might continue day after day to live in the midst of such things, and never for a moment find dull care beginning to sit upon his shoulders. Now there are two ways of dealing with these beginnings of care, the nascent emotions of anxiety and worry, of which the one is altogether wrong and a needless torture of ourselves, whilst the other is commended by its results as well as by the experience of this wise and much buffeted apostle. The wrong way is that of nursing our cares, dwelling upon them and letting them dwell upon us, until we lose the mastery of ourselves, and are reduced to a condition of impatience, sometimes even of irritability and moodiness, by reason of which we become simply centres of discomfort and weakness. That is the course we more often drift into than deliberately adopt; and its natural consequences are the embitterment of our days, the reduction of our power for design or for execution, sometimes even the frustration of the very purposes upon which we spend our care.

The better way is the one set forth by St. Paul in this passage, "Be careful for nothing, but in everything let your requests be made known before God." "Before God," or "to Godward," expresses the meaning of the final words better than the "unto God" of the English versions; for the apostle does not seem to be pleading here for the importunity which with its varied weapons of prayer and

supplication besieges the throne of God, and consents to no satisfaction until its eagerness prevails. What he intended was rather, Pour out all your harassments and perplexities before God, and leave them there with Him ; substitute an unwavering faith in Him, His government of the world, His gracious relations to human thought and life, for your ceaseless anxiety and carefulness. That is a piece of good advice, which may be found again and again in the Bible. One of the Proverbs (xvi. 3) puts it, "Commit" (or, according to the margin, Roll) "thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established": and so one of the Psalms (lv. 22), "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." In the earlier part of the great "Fret not" Psalm (xxxvii.), verse after verse repeats the same advice: "Trust in the Lord, and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. . . . Commit thy way unto the Lord ; trust also in Him ; and He shall bring it to pass." The New Testament carries on the line of counsel. Peter, who if any man knew what it was to have laid upon him the care of his own temper and spirit, bids (1 Pet. v. 7) us cast all our care upon God. And Christ Himself singles out those things which are so indispensable that, unless a man has them, he dies, and says (Luke xii. 29, according to the marginal reading), "Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, and live not in careful suspense, for . . . your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." That is the way in which we ought to pass our days, "not unmoved by earth's interests or untouched" by any sinless part of the busy life in which we have to mix ; not frightened by it either, but quietly doing our duties in our best way, refusing to count anything that comes to us a burden, patient and inflexible of purpose, with spirits

that are abidingly calm because influenced in their every emotion by a ruling and indestructible faith in God. The poets, some of them, have been able to see such an ideal life for man. One of them indeed sings with some hesitation—

“Calm’s not life’s crown, though calm is well”;

but another puts aside the hesitation, and says—

To bear all naked truth,  
And to envisage circumstance,—all calm;  
That is the top of sovereignty.

Few of us probably would care to deny that the latter poet, if his words be interpreted in a Christian sense, was right. “Careless through outward cares” to go, to face all our responsibilities, the pressure and the uncertain issues of the present, and the possibilities of the future, without a tremor; amidst opposition, difficulty, solitude, misunderstanding, every kind of unwelcome ill, to pass quietly on along our own path of dutifulness, “swallowing our disgusts,” following our own consciences, and doing our own work—the world is pretty well agreed, that a man who can manage that need desire little more.

II. Whether a man can manage that is another question, which some may be disposed to answer in the negative, both their failures in the past and the actual difficulty of attaining such an experience tending to make them hopeless about it. There have, however, been instances apart from religion, where in virtue of some special force of character or will a man has been able to stand seemingly unmoved in the midst of perils and difficulties the most oppressive: so that nature herself can be disciplined or drilled into an immobility and appearance of repose, not entirely unlike this divine peace. Where religious influences come into play, the instances multiply; and the calm, ceasing to be

merely a product of volition, suffuses the spirit, and takes the heart under its control. The Christian fellowship has never been without its heroes of trust, who had learnt to be tranquil in all entanglements with opposition and sorrow, who knew where to find a sure resting-place, whatever the responsibility upon them or the keenness of the assailing pain. The secret of it is what St. Paul is referring to, the making every request known before God, introducing the thought of Him into everything and communicating everything to Him, facing our sorrows and plans and aptitudes to sin with the assured confidence in God our Father that His grace will bring us triumphantly through. Men have tried other means. They have entrusted their conscience to an external authority, committed themselves for guidance to some human mind as erring and weak as their own; and the result has sometimes been the peace of suppression, never the free harmony of all the elements of the inner life in the unrestrained and self-directed service of God. Or they have betaken themselves to philosophies, and elaborated systems that nourish the self-control of the stoic, the heedlessness of the cynic; but neither self-control nor heedlessness constitutes that peace, "which passeth all understanding," and has its roots in other ground than that of the intellect. On the other hand, there was in the life of the Saviour a significant incident, which more than one of the evangelists describe. The disciples are toiling in rowing against a contrary wind, with spirits full of fear and perils on every side of them; but no sooner have they taken Jesus into the ship, than the wind ceased and there was a great calm, and "immediately the ship was at the land whither they went." That is the great secret of tranquillity still—never to separate ourselves from our God, but to carry the



remembrance of Him and the faith of Him with us everywhere. He who does that, will not be greatly disturbed by his questionings, and difficulties, and memories of weakness and failure, but will generally have within his spirit a divine calm, and at every inlet of evil into his spirit the sentinel-like "peace of God,"—the encompassing angel-guard, an impenetrable barrier against care.

III. This method of the substitution of confidence in God for the anxiety of combined worry, foreboding, and doubt, may be applied with wisdom to one or two of the matters that are wont to trouble men. Let it be applied, for instance, to matters of religious controversy and ecclesiastical alarm, such as the fears, happily becoming less prevalent, that some of the integral doctrines of the Christian faith are about to collapse and disappear, as the result of a logical application of the conclusions of certain modern scholars. The question is, Shall we entertain those fears, or is there a more excellent way? Not only does Scripture contain a wise generalisation to the effect that "he that believeth shall not make haste"; but there is a wide agreement, as a writer in one of the secular journals lately reminded us, that "the time is probably far distant when we shall be able to appraise with confidence many of these tentative conclusions." In this period of waiting, is it better for us to be full of care for the ark of God and tremulous as to its safety, or to be without care and full of the assurance that God and the truth will endure? That it will be a period of temptation, admits of but little doubt, because it is likely to be marked by recurring conflicts between two antagonistic and widespread tempers, a prepossession for the old and a prepossession for the novel. On the one hand, there is the curious suspicion of everything in doctrine or usage or polity,

that happens to have come down to the present from an earlier generation, as though everything decided by the fathers needed revision and was probably wrong; and on the other hand, there is the sturdy feeling that everything knowable about God is already known, and that no change for the better can be made even in its expression. In the strife between these tempers, it is not always easy for a man to keep tranquil in his spirit and constant in his trust. He has, however, two resources at least, neither of which will fail him, each of which will quiet him in its measure. He can recall some of the fortunes of the City of God in the past, and then he can whisper away any lingering fears in secret before his God. There have been times in the past when the essential parts of the received Christian creed have seemed to be in sorer straits than even the timid can imagine them to be in now. Twice within the memory of men still living there has been disheartenment within the camp of Christ, exultant rejoicing outside of it; but on each occasion the rejoicing proved premature. The one crisis has already enriched the world's stock of proverbs with another illustration of the possibility of claiming victory too soon; and the other has purified and perfected the argument from design for the existence of God. Similarly with our more recent controversies, the alleged weakening of old faiths, and the persistent efforts to secularise some of the churches, if we cannot always see whither these things are tending, and in times of weariness are tempted to fear that we may have to give up what we have learnt to hold most dear, we should remember the past, and so fortify ourselves in the conviction of the absolute impossibility that any truth can ever be discovered to the dishonour of the God of all truth, that any act can ever be done that will confuse or break His purposes

of grace. Should men's voices still seem too loud and threatening, the best resource remains ; and "in the secret place of the Most High" the heart must pour out its wishes before God, and it will not fail to have at once its strength and its peace restored. That, and not tremulousness, is the reasonable Christian attitude towards our modern controversies, recommended by an apostle who was a great master of controversy, always owned and blessed by the God of peace.

2. With matters of personal opposition, censure, misrepresentation—of loss, responsibility, trouble, it is much the same. The rule is, "Be careful for nothing, but feed your trust in God, until it yield its fruit of peace." Just as the Psalmist did, when he sang, "The Lord liveth ; and blessed be my rock ; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me. He delivereth me from mine enemies : yea, Thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me." There is a better example still, and a richer source of inspiration. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds : ye have not yet resisted unto blood," as He did. The contradiction of sinners against Christ was unlimited in its malignity, and yet was endured for our sakes with a patience at which the world wonders, and with a confidence in the issue that knew no faltering. No tempted or burdened man can do better than consider that, and no man can rightly consider it without entering quickly into the possession of a little more of his Saviour's peace. For still the best prayer that can be addressed to God in behalf of a godly man who is perplexed and careworn, is St. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians : "The Lord direct your hearts into the patience of Christ."

3. But there is another sphere of experience, another source of care more formidable and full than either of these. For most men know what it is to be teased sometimes almost into hopelessness by their own sins, their constant failures in duty or under temptation, the slowness of the process of perfecting, and now and again the difficulty of seeing that any such process is taking place in them at all. Effort after effort is made, year after year passes by ; and in some of our moods we are wont to imagine that the old sins are no nearer being beaten, that the distance which separates us from God is even lengthening as our lives draw to their close. What shall we do? Brood over it? Take all the miserable secrets of spirit, and motive, and conscience, every corrupt thing we can find in the graveyard of memory, and nurse them, and let them eat their fatal way into our hopes and our faith? That is the quick road to dulness and bewilderment, to the loss of every particle of spiritual strength, and at last to hopelessness and despair. David knew it well, and tells us enough about it in one of his Psalms. "When I kept silence," with thought turned resolutely inwards upon my own sins, and never outwards towards the mercy and grace of God, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long : for day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me ; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." But David was not long in discovering a better way, and had soon to change his tone : "Thou art my hiding-place ; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble ; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." St. Paul's method is the same : "Be careful for nothing"—not even for the sins which God has pardoned, for there is no wisdom in putting back upon the shoulders a load which God's mercy has just taken away—"be careful for nothing,

but remember the care, and love, and boundless help of the Lord who died for you, and tell Him all your fears and wishes about yourself." That is a mode of dealing with our recurring sinfulness and blunders, that always vindicates itself to sincerity as unfailing. The grace of God is everywhere about us, waiting to be received. Let us use it diligently, and give its Giver the response of devotion and trust which He seeks, and carry the consciousness of it and of Him with us into all the rough or gloomy places through which we may have to go; and then, though the strength may occasionally droop, and now and again a little wave of faintness may pass over the heart, the spirit will be clear with an ever completer serenity and repose, life will become the calm of undisturbed and careless dutifulness, and the grace of God will gradually fit us to enter into His eternal peace.



IX

The Determining Factor in Mind  
and Heart





## THE DETERMINING FACTOR IN MIND AND HEART

Have salt in yourselves.—MARK ix. 50.

THE connexion between the two phrases in this verse is not at first sight obvious, a man with salt in him being apparently more likely to provoke opposition and ill-will, than to minister to good feeling and peaceableness. But it has been suggested with much plausibility that our Saviour had in His thoughts the ancient oriental use of salt as a pledge of friendship and alliance. By one nation at least a traitor was scornfully described as a man who was "faithless to salt"; and amongst more than one the eating together of bread and salt has been the seal of reconciliation, or the symbol of close compact and covenant. In the Old Testament the figure occurs in that sense in several passages where the context is of great interest. In one place the law warns the worshipper, Thou shalt not "suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering"; and in another it prescribes the condition of what it calls "a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee." "The Lord," said Abijah, "gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever by a covenant of salt,"—a promise that was inviolable and guarded by every sanction. When the returned exiles were rebuilding their temple, their enemies tried to ingratiate themselves with the

king and to conceal their actual motives by the plea (Ezra iv. 14, R.V.), "We eat the salt of the palace, and it is not meet for us to see the king's dishonour," or to forget our sacred obligations to him. Accordingly, Christ, having used the figure in another sense, at once recalls its associations with the common life as well as with the official procedure of the East, and links the sharp seasoning within with the gentle bearing towards those who are without, "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

Omitting smaller or subsidiary uses of the figure, there are two principal ones that may be traced in our Lord's teaching. Sometimes He speaks with its help of the influence of godliness and of godly men upon society and upon the world at large, as when He tells His disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth." That implies that a Christian man ought to be and is a kind of living conscience to his neighbours; that, unless they are alike restrained from evil by his influence and stimulated in right purpose and effort, there is something wrong with his Christianity. How widely this work of salting the earth has been done, and is being done, few men can have failed to notice. For if the social habits and the public opinion of the most powerful nations are as yet far from being Christian in all their details, the influence of Christianity and of Christian men has already made itself felt in every civilised country to such an extent that the vices are almost all counted dishonourable, and the men who ignore the obligations of religion are compelled at least to respect its restraints. Society without religion, so a great historian once wrote, is "a godless and corrupting mass, never far from anarchy"; the great factor in preserving it from anarchy, in checking the spread of corruption, in turning the tide of life back into channels of

progress and promise, is not so much the vigour of unsleeping repression as the inspiration of a Christ-like love. Even in such seemingly secular matters as the planting of colonies, the revolutions that have led to enlarged liberty and privilege, the expansion of races on the face of the earth, amongst the causes must be found a place for adventure, for commerce, for lust of empire; but the foremost place, for range and for intensity, must probably be given to religion. The masterpieces of the modern world, in art and music, in literature and legislation, in beneficence and social theory, are for the most part the products of the influence of religion, or were designed to do it honour. And the world's great hope for the future lies in the spread of the same leavening influence amongst all classes and amidst all relationships of men. To bring Christian influence to bear upon departments of life, if there be any, which it has not already touched, and to intensify and widen that influence wherever it is now at work, applying it to every perplexity in politics or in economics, until it becomes without dispute or rivalry the master-force in human life determining everything else,—that is a duty which our Lord binds upon every disciple, and from which no Christian can discharge himself without sin.

But in this passage our Lord uses the figure in a related but slightly different sense. He is not speaking so much of the streaming out of influence from His followers upon other men, <sup>but</sup> as of something in themselves which is to affect everything else that is in them, <sup>and</sup> to affect them, quietly it may be, but with just such magnificent and perfect results as the silent forces of the universe are always wont to produce. For there are two principal properties or uses of salt, both of which may legitimately and indeed must in reason be traced

in our Lord's fresh application of this figure. There is on the one hand its antiseptic property, in virtue of which it preserves from corruption, penetrating anything that is corruptible and fixing it in soundness and health. On the other hand, there is the seasoning quality which makes it a condiment, flavouring and vitalising the substance with which it is mixed. Accordingly, our Saviour bids us have and keep in ourselves something that will accomplish in us that double purpose, that will not only check the gradual degradation of nature that is due to sin, but will even reverse the process, sweetening and maturing the whole soul, quickening it into vigour, and virtue, and likeness to God. Of all life's gifts none can be compared in value with that. For there can be few Christians who are not familiar with occasional startling discoveries, interrupting or more fortunately closing periods of religious languor, how rapidly sin has availed itself of our remissness to increase its hold upon us. Hesitating belief declining into actual doubt, and an atmosphere of doubt gradually spreading over the soul and inducing a temper of suspicion as to alike the fundamental truths and the revealed possibilities of religion—conscience, that once permitted no neglect of duty to pass without rebuke, now tending to silence whenever obligation appeals solely or chiefly to religious sentiment—love for God ceasing to be a passion and gradually becoming a mere phrase, whilst the sins find week after week a more undisturbed home in our hearts, and the very appetite for godliness seems to be dying out; our Saviour tells us of something that will not merely arrest this terrible decline but reverse it, causing the righteousness to spread instead of the corruption, until the whole soul is quickened and sanctified, and every faculty is alert and active for God. What is this salt? and, How may it

be obtained? are therefore questions of great urgency and wisdom.

1. There are several ways in which the nature of this salt and its methods of operation may with advantage be considered. Intellectual, emotional, divine elements enter into it; and its action, whilst uniform in results, is capable of slight modifications to meet the differences of human temperaments and needs. The advice may be regarded, first of all, as counselling the regulation of all opinions and plans under the influence of religious conceptions of the world, of human life and human duty. The effect of such conceptions can easily be contrasted with that of the opposite class of non-religious or neutral ones. We are told, for instance, by one of the ablest and most popular advocates of the dominant theory of the day, that "the theory of evolution encourages no millennial anticipations. If for millions of years our globe has taken the upward road, yet some time the summit will be reached and the downward route be commenced. The most daring imagination will hardly venture upon the suggestion that the power and intelligence of man can ever arrest the procession of the great year." Another writer of at least equal authority and eminence, as credited with the formulation of the very theory in question, recognises in nature something more than the power and intelligence of man, and in "the unseen universe of spirit" finds adequate ground for the belief that man will not vanish and cease to be, but is "surely destined for a higher and more permanent existence." This wonderful world, with all its treasures of beauty and use, and humanity itself, after absorbing the achievements of each passing generation, just to die out into a more dismal nothingness than the void from which it sprang,—that is the hopeless and crippling view of

life with which unsalted human reason would tantalise and humble us. It is better to believe that over all is a God, blessed for ever. That "all Nature is but Art, . . . all chance, direction," was the conclusion of a great poet who had learnt to see a little into the mystery of things; and a man who beholds God in all and over all, manifesting Himself or His will in the aspects of nature and in the discipline and progress of the ages, will be able to form a theory of the universe, closely articulated in its parts, and restful to thought and heart. "The heavens are Thine" (sang an old Psalmist), "the earth also is Thine; the world and the fulness thereof Thou hast founded them"; and there is no philosophy of nature that can compete with that. For still "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy name shall they rejoice all the day; and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

Or if our view be confined more closely to the relationships of men, to the conflicts of human purpose, to the experiences of uncertainty and change of which every life is full, the wisdom of the Saviour's counsel is at least equally certain. It is almost difficult to imagine how thinking men, who are destitute of faith in God's providence, or who have allowed their religious conceptions to become partially eclipsed, can manage to form any plans for a remote future, to entertain any large hopes, or to do anything more than try just to live on easily from day to day. If they do not think, custom, or ambition, or the pressure of need may make them ingenious and active. But if they do, they will see tumult everywhere, clashing interests, contending classes, unstable opinions, and hardly a single principle, political or social, economical or moral, that is

not assailed with bitterness or with assumed confidence of success. Institutions and usages, all breaking down; methods changing; the whole social order everywhere threatened, and the air full of the voices of those who would angrily or jauntily experiment at its healing,—a man who has no real faith in God may well fancy in his dull moments that the world is drifting or hurrying hopelessly to the bad. But if he does believe in God, and especially if that faith is assigned its central position of authority amongst his beliefs, he will have within him something that will quiet and nerve his spirit, and enable him to play his part in life with confidence and vigour. The Bible is full of instances of the way in which these religious conceptions of life act upon the heart and so upon the hand of the God-fearing. In the Psalms facts of that kind come to the front again and again. The waters are roaring and troubled, so that the mountains shake with their swelling; the heathen rage, and the kingdoms are moved; but the mere utterance of the voice of God quells them all: therefore, concludes the singer, “will not we fear.” In another place, mischief and malignity seem to be closing in around a man; but he has learnt the secret of peace, and confronts at once the causes of fear: “My soul, wait thou only upon God . . . He is my defence; I shall not be moved”; and then turns triumphantly to his trembling fellows: “Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.” That is still the conviction with which we need to have our thoughts salted, whenever we are tempted to despond about the state of the world or of the Church, or about our own prospects and plans—events do not happen by hazard, or according to human caprice or passion, but are bound to the throne of God; and whatever

the skill or the progress of man's devices, "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." God rules everywhere in absolute sovereignty, and believing that, we can live quietly in a world of conflict and change, doing our own work faithfully, unvisited by any great fear. For trust in Him will salt our thoughts, saving us at once from the imbecility of alarm and from the helplessness of cynicism, keeping us steady and hopeful day by day in every kind of dutifulness. Everything we have to do, due to the state, or to our neighbours, or to ourselves, will be transformed by our religious conceptions, and gathered up into one all-embracing and inexhaustible obligation to God; and thus no single duty will be able to be ignored or to be transcended, but an adequate motive will be found for each, and the issues of all will be certain.

2. It is not well, however, to regard this salt principally from an intellectual point of view. It denotes more directly some gracious influence in the spirit and heart of a man, sanctifying his character and sanctifying in its outflow. "Have salt in yourselves,"—that is, Have something in yourselves that will make the spirit sweet and strong, some central spring of goodness, a divine influence touching every faculty and determining every expression. What a difference there is in a man and in his life, according as he has or has not this salt! With the outbreaks of the unsalted spirit, outbreaks of selfishness, or petulance, or rage, every one is sufficiently familiar; would that we were equally familiar with the vitalising grace of a salted spirit, helping by its godly firmness others to be firm, and by its gentleness others to be peaceable! The reason why our power against temptation is so small, and our influence upon our neighbours so doubtful, is that we have no salt in ourselves, or



that we so check and neutralise the little we have that it can do nothing for us. That the salt stands for personal goodness wrought by the grace of God, admits of no controversy. For why is it that so many professed Christians seem year after year to make next to no progress in personal religion, that they continue full of little languors, and little tempers, and little weaknesses, and are themselves feeble against sin, and a source of strength and inspiration to nobody? There is something wrong with their personal characters, or, in other words, with the degree of their devotion to God. It ought to be whole-souled and intolerant of restraints, the entire spirit salted by the grace of God, and that quickening influence streaming through mind and heart and will, fatal to sin and fruitful of every virtue. Occasionally one meets with people who answer such a description; the grace of God found them awkward, and helpless, and full of evil, and has made them manifestly pure and meek and centres of spiritual force, so that their "lives are fragrant as the breath of angels." If we have salt in ourselves, and cherish and encourage it, it will make us like them, like Him who was their Lord, and is ours; until we get it, and rightly use it, the mastery of self is impossible, and the corruption of heart and life must continue.

3. But it is possible perhaps to regard this salt in an even more helpful way. There are many indications that it is not anything belonging in its origin to human nature, or capable of being obtained merely by human processes of volition or discipline. For the spirit of man in itself is much like the vile fountain whose waters were death, that Elisha found near Jericho; the only way of sweetening them is by bringing salt from without and casting it into the

spring. There is an old saying to the effect that "the devil cannot endure salt, and all the dishes at his meals are without it"; and if the salt is so abhorrent to him as that, it cannot be any original property or personal acquisition of man, but must be something divine. In temptation, it is a lesson of uniform experience that the best course is to betake ourselves to prayer, and to get our spirits salted more thoroughly from above; and in arduous service, the very secret of success is to live ourselves in, and to compass others about with, the salting atmosphere of godly sympathy and help. Indeed, the very fact that in practice the salt takes the form of religious conceptions and of religious influences upon character, at once throws us back in search of its origin upon religious sources; and accordingly, it is sometimes best to think of it, not so much in the forms it assumes when combined with human elements, but rather in its pure form as it comes down upon a man from heaven, as the preserving principle of divine grace, as the influence of the Holy Spirit Himself.

If the salt be the Spirit of God as the Spirit of discipline, it is obvious that to its value and to its power there is no limit at all. We can "grieve the Holy Spirit of God," just as we can counteract or check the action of salt; and then of course the Spirit operates but feebly, or ceases to operate at all. But if, on the other hand, we cherish the Spirit of God, investing Him with full control over ourselves, allowing ourselves in no purpose or motive contrary to Him, 'most pleased when His influence is having altogether its own way with us, then there is literally no tenacity of sinfulness in us which He cannot overcome, no height or sweetness of virtue to which He cannot lift us. The Saviour Himself says in one place concerning the Spirit, "He will

guide you into all truth," and in another, pledges His presence with us as the abiding Comforter, that we may never feel comfortless. To our minds, therefore, the indwelling Spirit will reveal whatever truth concerning Christ or man it is necessary for us to know, and to our hearts will communicate the Saviour's peace. Or if we want "power from on high" for self-mastery or for service, the expulsion from our hearts of vices that have rooted themselves there, the impartation of the graces that are now most alien, the transformation of the evil self so that its evil is replaced everywhere by sanctity,—the Spirit of God will do it all for us, if we will but let Him, "sealing us unto the day of redemption." This precept of our Saviour's consequently appeals to the strongest desires of a sincere man, and assumes the simple form—Put yourself entirely under the influence of the Spirit of God, let the heart be His temple, and there let Him reign in undisputed and all-welcome sovereignty.

Now it is probably unquestionable that the cause of our religious failures, in service and in personal discipline, is to be found principally in the dishonour we heedlessly do to the Spirit. An interesting man, lamenting once over the sterility of church-work in spite of all the modern elaborations of agency and benevolence, came to the conclusion that the sterility was due to the fact that "the sword-arm was not moved by the Spirit of the Almighty." If we could only keep the truth constantly with us, that in service our object is not simply to bring human skill to bear upon sin and indifference, but to bring the Spirit of God to bear, our lips would soon again become familiar with the chant, "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place." For the great rule of success is, first to get

ourselves salted by the Spirit of God, and then to let the salt stream out. Many a neighbourhood has been sweetened in that way before now, and many a sinner broken down ; and the Gospel as yet is not much more than at the beginning of its victories. So with personal discipline, the wiser and the more persistent it can be made, the better ; but no wisdom is perfect, no human will unfaltering, nor are wisdom and will competent in themselves to deal with so vital a principle as that of sin. On the other hand, leaven placed in the midst of "three measures of meal" will leaven the whole, the salt will push its quickening properties silently on until it has seasoned the whole, the life will flow from the central secrecies to the farthest twig, clothing it all with foliage and with fruit ; and the Spirit of God in the heart of a man, cherished there with reverence, will crowd out all evil, and correct all error, and endow with all power, sanctifying the whole. That is what we must aim at, and what we must in some way manage, if we want to be rid of sin,—to have the Spirit of God always unrestrainedly in our hearts.

In some of their moods it is possible that men forget how much of the influence of the Spirit they may have, and so weaken themselves in hope and in prayer. There are some stimulating passages in this respect in the Bible. One of the Psalms speaks of "the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments,"—a kind of all-encompassing shower, saturating every part of the man and in its superfluity soaking even the ground upon which he stood. That is the measure of spiritual unction that is provided still for God-fearing men. In one of St. Paul's Epistles, the apostle puts the exhortation, "Be filled with the Spirit," in a context of such a kind that some men have even

ventured to construct upon its suggestions the phrase, "a God-intoxicated man." The phrase is not altogether happy, inasmuch as the Spirit is not the author of excess or of confusion, though there are times when His influence seems almost to overpower a man, and to sweep him on to effort or to holy vision. But to be "filled with the Spirit," not occasionally merely, but as an uninterrupted experience—that is what we want, the Spirit of God always within us, guarding, ruling, perfecting. If a man ask how such a blessing may be obtained, the covenant use of the symbol alone is a sufficient answer to that question. To have the salt of God, is to be God's in covenant relationship; to have it in one's heart is to be His in loving and entire devotion. And the heart that is wholly His will be itself seasoned throughout, every grace growing vigorously, and the entire influence of the man tending to the peace and the sanctification of his neighbours and to the glory of God.



X

## The Irresistible Allies





## THE IRRESISTIBLE ALLIES

Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.—ISA. lxii. 6, 7, R.V.

THERE are sufficient indications that these verses and the entire chapter relate chiefly to the spiritual events of an age that was in the future to the prophet himself. The previous chapter is concerned with the earthly ministry of the Saviour, and the following one represents Him as in Edom executing judgment upon His enemies, "the day of vengeance" having come; and this apparently covers the period between the two, and sets forth especially the completion of the work of Christ on its constructive side, and its completed results—a Church, established in the praise of all men, "sought out" and "not forsaken," "a royal diadem in the hand" of its God. To some extent, of course, the blessed prophecies it contains still wait for their accomplishment; but partial fulfilments of them may be found in every age since Christ died, and not least in our own. And the passage may be safely taken as a promise of what God proposes to do for the Christian Church and for its individual members, and as an appeal to them for the discharge of certain corresponding duties.

I. The last phrases in the passage indicate very clearly what He proposes, or, to put it as the prophet does, what

He must be reminded and persuaded to do,—to “establish” and to “make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” Jerusalem, the city of God, of necessity represents the people of God, first of all, as an organised whole, and then in the separate individuals that constitute the whole. The chapter accordingly sets before us, as one of the objects towards which God is working, an established Church, the object of universal praise. The word “established” is the prophet’s, and must not be taken in the sense in which it is used in a standing ecclesiastical dispute. Concerning that dispute, indeed, neither the prophet nor Scripture anywhere has much directly to say, and certainly here the meaning does not go beyond the ordinary idea of making the Church steadfast, firm, strong. To a large extent it answers that description already, notwithstanding the doubt and hesitancy or the cynical rejoicing of those who cannot see through the controversial smoke that envelops it. It has been compared to a great lighthouse, directing men to safety, played about by storm and foam, whose misty quiverings seem at times to make it quiver, yet standing immovable upon its foundation of rock, and surviving unharmed the malice of all the elements.

Those two features in its condition are, so many say, strikingly manifest at the present day. Around it there is the ferment of free discussion, sometimes hostile, sometimes tremulous and uncertain, but everywhere vigorously pushing the contention towards its final issues. Its separate parts and denominations are busying themselves with the correction of alleged wrongs, with what is called by some a process of necessary adaptation and by others of perpetual flux and change; and in some of the Protestant communities the revision of the constitution has become almost as favourite

an occupation as in a certain part of the Continent. Occasionally curious statements are made, with apparent confidence, for our benefit or warning. We are told, for instance, that in some Christian creeds there are points where the creed conflicts with reason, and where the supremacy of reason must be maintained; that no support can be found for some prescribed moral usages either in the fundamental principles of human nature or in an adequate authority outside of it; that some of the ceremonials of religion are destitute of dignity, inwardness, art, and have ceased to be in any way the expression or the product of life. The verdict of impossibility is at times pronounced over the contents of the Bible in the name of physical science, or its arrangement and inspiration are assailed in the name of historical criticism. All this certainly does not at first sight and upon the surface look like establishment. On the contrary, by some men it is held to be a proof of failure, whilst others regard it with suspicion as an evidence at least of weakness, and are tempted to turn from passages of this kind with the exulting or the sad conclusion, that both the Scriptures and the religion to which they minister are moribund and decaying, that little further advantage from them in regard to morals or to human well-being can reasonably be expected.

But that conclusion is too hasty, unwarranted by the experience of the past, inconsistent with principles that never consent to be ignored and with manifest tendencies in the drift of human thought and opinion. For if the extreme supernaturalism of our fathers is gradually becoming a little discredited, and the number is decreasing of those who are prepared to exalt the merely unintelligible into the miraculous, the testimony of consciousness on the

other hand is in all probability accepted to-day more widely, and invested with a higher authority, than at any previous period. It is a shifting and re-disposition of the evidences of faith and morals,—disturbing to the most reverent minds, and dangerous to some; but it is a shifting which promises to make the foundation in human thought of religion and of the moral sentiments more solid and unassailable than ever. Similarly with the appearance of weakness which the Bible is supposed to be taking on amidst the processes of historical criticism through which it is passing. Not only is it a distinct advantage to the thoughtful disciple to have sometimes “to breast the bracing air of opposition, and to join in the fight of faith where all are striving for what they honestly believe to be true,” but there is really no need to regard these modern investigations, as at least they are pursued in most cases in this country, with suspicion either of unfriendliness or of danger. The man who of all the scholars of the land is perhaps the most completely in sympathy with them, and most deeply committed to their methods and results, writes that “there is a message from God to man in every part of the Bible,” and that the condition of discovering the message is that the reason be “stimulated to its highest activity by spiritual influences.” Past assaults, too, upon the City or the word of God, cleansings of the former and modifications in the interpretation of the latter, do not justify any fear, but rather warrant the assurance that all truth is one and immortal, all its parts fitting perfectly into one another. As long as the connexions are obscure, or whilst the new connexions are coming into light, there may be the appearance of breaches in the walls of Jerusalem, a little tremor in the spirits of its unremembering citizens; but it is enough

to re-inspirit them to remember that the God of Jerusalem is God over all, revealing Himself in parts and ways that cannot possibly conflict. His rule over all, the inerrancy of the divine wisdom, the inflexibility of the divine purpose, are sufficient pledges of the permanency and progress of His city and word.

But this passage guarantees something more than even strength and establishment. Jerusalem is to be made "a praise in the earth." That promise prophet after prophet repeats, sometimes calling to his aid every kind of beautiful imagery, and sometimes pointing to the cause of the praise in the presence of the Holy One of Israel. Zephaniah, for instance, a prophet of royal descent, the traditions of whose house were full alike of suffering and of privilege, closes his short prophecy with a vivid bit of dramatisation. First of all, he addresses his fellow-citizens: "In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; and to Zion, Let not thy hands be slack: the Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy." And then his own voice ceases, in order that the one whose every tone is authority may be heard: "At that time will I bring you in, and at that time will I gather you; for I will make you a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth." It is much the same with Isaiah himself. "As the earth bringeth forth her bud" (he says), "and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." The earth in all the glories of her luxuriant herbage, every plant and every tree breaking forth into the promise of fruitfulness, all nature putting on her garments of beauty and power,—that, he says, is a symbol of what God will make the Church

(in the world to be) (That promise holds good still; and its growing fulfilment may be traced in the ever-growing disposition to exhaust all praise upon Him who is the Church's Head and Lord, the source of its strength and the centre of its worship. In every age since He died, He has been praised in proportion as He has been known; and in the records of no race that has heard of Him, with one certain and another doubtful exception, is any other name more highly honoured. Even that exceptional race is moderating at present the expression of its hatred, and beginning to confess with hesitation the human ascendancy of the Nazarene. By all the world beside He has been singled out for unexampled praise. To the best men of old He was the mirror of every grace and virtue. One of the most lauded philosophies has "abstracted His qualities from His personality," and now bids the world worship their impersonal generalisation. And whatever other direction is being taken by human thought within the Church or in its immediate borders, it is, at least, taxing all its resources in order to pour increased praise upon the Saviour.) (It is true that the Church itself is not equally praised, but that is as a rule because its practice does not follow the example or come up to the standard of its Lord. As the days pass, the Spirit of Christ will ever more completely sway it, and determine its relations with the world; and thus its vitality and religious force will vindicate themselves, its critics will join the swelling ranks of worshippers, and it will become "a praise in the earth."

If all this is to be done for the Church, it must be that it will be done for each of the Christians who compose it. Accordingly, every follower of Christ has a right to regard this passage as a promise of God to establish him, to make

him strong in discipleship, faith, power against sin,—to make him “a praise in the earth.” At present there is probably no Christian worthy the name, who is not constantly discovering, and often groaning in secret almost hopelessly over the discovery, how weak and unestablished he is. Temptation, however small, has but to assail us subtly or suddenly, and we become an easy prey. When we begin to search our own spirits, and try to find out what we really are, a conclusion that is not satisfactory or pleasant is soon forced upon us. Self, not crucified and slain, but even exacting in its demands for indulgence; ill-tempered, irritable, resentful, vindictive; able sometimes to turn out poor work without compunction; conscious of sinfulness, which we treat with alternating indifference and remorse, but to be rid of which we make few serious and prolonged efforts; sometimes not caring much even to keep the surface of our lives correct, still less to sweep out of our hearts the riot of foul passions, or to silence the strife of low motives,—that, or something like that, is the account we are disposed to give of ourselves in some of our moods; and anything like the final mastery of sin, or unwavering firmness in our allegiance to Christ, is apt to seem for ever impossible. Yet that it is possible, the whole Bible and all godly experience testify. That man will find sin to be obstinate, inveterate, indwelling, slow to confess itself beaten, is precisely in accordance with the implication of Scripture, which proceeds to repeat and urge the assurance that the grace of God will secure for man victory in the end. Establishment so firm that we need neither yield to temptation nor waver in faith, but may find ourselves strong enough to stand erect amidst the play upon us of all evil influences, and to hold our own against every foe; the rock felt to be

steady beneath our feet, the favour of God compassing us as a shield, and the shelter of His wings above; life spent day after day in ever closer, quieter, more dutiful fellowship with Him, and from that fellowship power streaming into every faculty, until the entire manner of living becomes an irresistible testimony to the grace of God, a restraint upon evil, a theme of praise to "all the earth,"—that is the hope concerning ourselves which the Bible warrants our cherishing. We faulty, feeble, often vanquished sinners, seeming to make little progress, but after every fresh effort to be no nearer God than before, if we will only serve God with all the soul, shall gradually become strong, whole-hearted, God-fearing men, confessed as such in our own section of "all the earth."

II. These are very great hopes for a man to entertain concerning himself; and their realisation depends of necessity upon certain conditions, which are set forth with adequate fulness in the rest of the passage: "Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give Him no rest." It is hardly possible not to linger a little over this curious appellation, "the Lord's remembrancers," given in the margin of the Authorised Version, and in the text of the Revised. Several interpretations of it have been suggested. The original word itself has both the ordinary meaning of one who reminds another, and a technical meaning (2 Sam. xx. 24) akin to, though not identical with, that of the English word. By some it is applied to the angels, who are also supposed to be the "watchmen" upon the walls, referred to in the preceding clause. But such an explanation lifts the passage entirely out of the sphere of human privilege and duty, and introduces into it allusions to matters about which very little is known. There



may be in it a special reference to prophets, whose functions would naturally include that of leading the people in their supplications to God, as well as that of warning them of danger and inciting them to effort. But there is no need to confine the term to officials of any kind. The entire New Testament is a sufficient authority for applying it to all true Christians. If indeed there be truth in the tradition, in Judaism itself it was recognised in part of the sacrificial ritual that every man could be and ought to be the Lord's remembrancer. The forty-fourth Psalm describes some of the marvellous things done by Jehovah for Israel in the past, and the forsaken and oppressed condition of Israel in the present; and one of its closing verses is said to have been regularly sung for long in the temple worship,—the one in which Jehovah's remembrancers, after having reminded Him of their need and of His promised help, call upon Him: "Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord? Arise, cast us not off for ever." John Hyrcanus is reported to have abolished that custom, in spleen at the refusal of the Pharisees to let him reign in peace, or, possibly, according to a more charitable conjecture, under the feeling that the idea of awakening and reminding Jehovah involves a defect of faith. The psalm, however, is entirely true to human nature. For when men are tempted to imagine themselves forsaken of God and begirt inextricably by perils, it is an immense stimulus and encouragement of faith to remind God of their needs and of His promises, of their present reliance upon Him, and even (for Scripture warrants it elsewhere) of the way in which His faithfulness and honour are concerned in their protection and deliverance. Jacob prayed in that way, when he trembled at the thought of his brother's probable rage, pleading God's actual words of promise: "O God of my

fathers, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee : . . . Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother : . . . for (again) Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea." Two remembrancings, and between them a little prayer ; and of course the result was that, when Esau came, instead of pouring his rough followers upon the struggling and indefensible caravan, he fell on his brother's "neck and kissed him." David was surprised and almost staggered in unbelief at the prospect of greatness and renown which the prophet Nathan opened up to him, but he recovered and fed his faith by reminding himself and his God of the promise, and prayed, "Now, O Lord God, the word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as Thou hast said." In this very prophecy Israel first of all reminds Jehovah of what He has been wont to do, and what needs to be done now : "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord ; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old." The result is seen in vision at once : "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Sion" ; and so all the watchmen lift up their voices : "Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem : the Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." We shall never suffer much prolonged doubt as to our own establishment or the Church's, if we will only duly remember and exercise our high vocation, to remind God of our perils and needs and of His promised grace and help.

2. But simply thus to pray does not, according to this

passage, exhaust the human conditions of our own perfecting and of the Church's progress and strength. Two other conditions are singled out to emphasise their necessity: "Take ye no rest, and give Him no rest" — unresting activity on our part, and ceaselessness of prayer: those together are the means of moving the mighty will of Jehovah, the double-edged sword whose wielding is fatal to all the powers of evil. The ~~former~~ phrase was perhaps meant historically to be a protest against impatience and despondency rather than against idleness, but it may fairly be taken in its widest sense as an appeal for hopeful and confident perseverance in every kind of Christian work. There are tendencies in most men's hearts, which make such an appeal very necessary even in an age of evangelism. Disappointment with the visible results of work or with the apparent effects of self-discipline, the length of the interval which separates the harvest from the seed-time, the perfecting of the spirit from the remote moment of its conversion,—these things are sometimes apt to produce within us a degree of hesitation, often almost of suspicion, concerning religious prospects and forces, that is fatal to anything like persistent enthusiasm. And yet persistent enthusiasm, the having our spirits continually swayed or filled with the Spirit of God, is precisely that which is essential to the increase of our own strength against sin, and to the Church's triumph. That accordingly is the prophet's first advice, "Take ye no rest," which is equivalent to saying, Never yield to despondency whatever the temptation, but remember the grace of God, and go steadily on day by day, smiting at every kind of evil within or without, entertaining no fears, giving no quarter to sin, never resting until the battle is over and the victory finally won.

Taking no rest ourselves, we must at the same time give God no rest. But the personal activity must be associated and allied with, or rather inspired and prompted by, the presence of God, within whose fellowship the whole life must be prayerfully spent. (It is significant <sup>how</sup> ~~what~~ a few men there are, whatever the variety or the thinness of their creed, who have not something good to say concerning what they call prayer. To its beneficial effects the witness is almost uniform. When a philosophy "falsely so called" denounces it as unreasonable, it will often confess it to be instinctive. That prayer elevates in some way and enriches the moral nature of the worshipper, is one of the conclusions that seem to be taken for granted almost everywhere, though an attempt is sometimes made to neutralise the admission by pleas of superstition or of illusion. Every Christian knows that it does infinitely more for him than that. All through the Bible God is represented as yielding to its importunity, and every sincere disciple is familiar with experiences, in which in response to his pleading God has come down to his aid. Jehovah in His righteous anger said to Moses, "Let Me alone, that I may consume this people"; but when Moses prayed, reminding God of his promise to the patriarchs, the record is—"The Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people." "Let me go, for the day breaketh," said the mysterious man with whom Jacob wrestled at the ford Jabbok; and because Jacob would not let him go, he soon prevailed. It is the same still. To pray with that kind of resolved importunity that will not be diverted,—to give God no rest, until He opens His hand, and pours down the influence of strength or grace we need: neither in heaven nor upon earth has that resource ever yet been found to fail.

Activity and prayer, each unceasing,—that is the irresistible combination which the prophet recommends and urges : to pray (some one says) as if God had to do everything, and to work as if everything depended upon ourselves. The certain result will be our own perfecting in the praiseful confession of others, whilst the Church also becomes strong and “a praise in the earth.” We know consequently what to do in experiences that frequently recur. When we discover anew our own spiritual feebleness, there is no need to waste in depression and complaint any energy that may remain ; the feebleness should be attributed at once to its right cause—that we take too much rest, or that we give God too much. On our knees, as God’s remembrancers, we should remind Him of His word, “He that is feeble among them shall be as David” ; and it will not be long before greater strength than David’s takes possession of us. Or when the Church seems to be shorn of its power, making no headway and winning no praise, the reason is again because we Christians do not pray enough or do not work enough. It is a magnificent prospect,—ourselves established so that all men confess our consistency and acknowledge our influence for good ; the Church “a praise in the earth,” everywhere triumphing over sin, with great crowds of men continuously streaming up to pay their homage to its Lord. Until that crowning consummation is reached, we must ourselves “take no rest and give Him no rest.”



XI

The Law of Self-Restraint





## THE LAW OF SELF-RESTRAINT

Whosoever goeth onward, and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God.—2 JOHN ix. R.V.

THAT so slight and short an epistle as this should have been admitted into the canon of Scripture, has sometimes been a matter of surprise. But its rights have been sufficiently vindicated, and its value is evident. For the comfort of a considerable portion of life depends upon the amenities of social intercourse; and a revelation adapted to man must not only exhibit the means of overcoming sin and of the religious perfecting of character, but must also in some way illustrate the grace and geniality that ought to characterise Christian friendship. Accordingly, both St. Paul and St. John, after treating of some of the profoundest mysteries of faith, add to their letters a kind of appendix, in which they exemplify the courtesy and sweetness of the ordinary communion between Christian and Christian. St. Paul does it in his Epistle to Philemon; and St. John in these two little letters, the smallest fragments of the Scripture of the New Covenant, but from one point of view amongst the most beautiful. When he wrote them, he was an old man, and for that reason principally calls himself simply "the elder." The last survivor of the apostles, he was unwilling to assert in private intercourse any apostolical authority, or any other authority except that which his age and ripe

experience gave him. The second Epistle he addresses to "the elect lady," some Christian mother about whom nothing else is known. He seems to have met her children in one of his visits of supervision to some church, and he thoughtfully avails himself of the opportunity to send good news of them to their mother, and to add a few words of encouragement and counsel. He rejoices with her that her children were "walking in truth," than which few Christian mothers would recognise any much greater cause of joy; and then he urges her and her children to continue to make dutiful love the law of their lives, never to partake in or in any way countenance the evil works of such "deceivers" as "confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh."

This ninth verse appears to contain one of the counsels that occurred to the apostle, as he thought on the one hand of youthful impulsiveness and love of novelty, and on the other of the fascinations that are wont to attach to dubious doctrines and to evil deeds. Its real meaning may be seen in the rendering of the Revised Version; for in the Authorised the passage is obscured and spoilt by the adoption of a reading, which the best evidence does not support. St. John wrote, not "whosoever transgresseth" (for he was not thinking of general breaches of the law of God), but specifically "whosoever goeth onward, and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God." If that be taken in connexion with the preceding verse, where a man is represented as through dulness and half-heartedness losing whatever he has gained, the unexpected but important lesson is obtained, that "to advance over-eagerly and to hang back are alike violations of duty," mistakes as far as intelligence is concerned, sources of weakness in practical life and in religion. That conclusion will be likely to

commend itself more fully, if each of the blunders against which we are cautioned is first of all viewed separately.

I. The first thing to avoid is over-eagerness. "Whosoever goeth onward" (at too great a rate, it means, or impelled by a hot fancy that has broken away from every restraint) "hath not God." It is possible to imagine that the phrase might be interpreted in a different way, as denoting that all progress in the statement or application of religious truths is for ever barred, and that the incapacity or the refusal to see in them any other bearings than have been found in the past must be classed amongst the virtues. But with such teaching no sympathy can be found in the Bible, either when respect is paid to the general character claimed for it, or when its particular contents are considered. If the Bible was a "dictionary of doctrine," compiled on a modern and exhaustive scale, or if the teaching of Christ assumed the form of a complete catalogue of things to be believed and of things to be done under every conceivable contingency, it might be held that on every religious subject the last possibly true thing had been said. But a dictionary is precisely what the body of revealed truth is not; and when Christ teaches, He teaches free men, providing them not with endless minute rules which they must mechanically follow, but with great principles which they must use their own wits in interpreting and their own responsible skill in applying. When all the various combinations of human temperament and human circumstance have been exhausted, when the mind of man has completed its growth, the Bible may cease to have a new message for man, and the householder cease to be able to bring out of his treasury things new as well as things old. Till then, the germs of religious truth will be perpetually unfolding

themselves, expanding into new conceptions of the glory of God and of the spiritual privilege possible to man ; and through all the future, one of the rewards of loyalty to Christ is to be that the loyal will be continually advancing in Christian thought, ever more completely knowing as they are known.

To make this or similar paragraphs, therefore, an old man's protest against progress, or an apology for intolerance, is to sin against the entire Scripture. The paragraph teaches that, when a man deliberately denies and rejects Jesus Christ, the rule to follow is, "Receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting ; for he that giveth him greeting" assumes part of the responsibility for the dishonour of the Saviour. But when, still honouring Christ with his whole heart, he sees fit to adopt different religious opinions from our own, more advanced or more retrograde, the right attitude towards him is that of Moses—"Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets !" or that of St. Paul—"Christ is preached ; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." A forward movement that parts company with Christ and leaves Him behind, is not to be confounded with one that measures its steps by the steps of its Lord, and never ventures to go onward beyond the range of His fellowship. The one, as St. John teaches, in spirit is Antichrist ; the other is one of the methods, effective even if sometimes weighted a little with human rashness, by which the kingdom of God is established amongst men.

2. That against which the Apostle cautions us is accordingly not progress of the right kind, for indeed the whole gospel is a gospel of progress, leading men and leading society onwards to greater moral comeliness and upwards to God. The warning is against needless progress, a progress

that is suicidal and unworthy the name, the impulsiveness and the haste that ignore all the restraints of reason—the vaulting ambition, in religious thought and teaching, and sometimes in practice too, that overleaps revelation, and natural proof, and the evidences of history, and every other obstacle of prudence. Ambition itself, when directed to the proper end and duly co-ordinated with the proper accompaniments, is right enough, and even a quality with which a Christian cannot dispense. Three times at least the very word itself finds a place in a context of approval upon the margin of the Revised Version. In one passage (1 Thess. iv. 11), St. Paul urges disciples, “Be ambitious to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands.” And twice the apostle uses the word of himself, once in application to his service and once to the most sacred desire of his heart: “Ambitious so to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named” (Rom. xv. 20), he was also “ambitious, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto the Lord” (2 Cor. v. 9). It is more than doubtful whether any Christian can get to know much about God, unless he be stirred by an ambition to know, or can make much progress in personal religion, unless he be taken possession of by the ambition to be made like his Saviour. The mistake is in allowing the ambition to separate itself from Christ, and, as men say, to run away with them, so that no influence from above or from within can withhold them from extravagance, but the force of every reasonable restraint is broken.

Of the serious mistakes, in matters of opinion and in matters of practice, to which this over-eagerness leads, the disposition that sweeps onwards under the dominancy of a single idea, and consents neither to look back upon the point

from which it started, nor to glance around at the facts with which relations should be maintained, there are instances enough. One man, for instance, is led to no good result by his own investigations into God's existence, and quickly pronounces that all such investigations must prove sterile, and founds an entire system upon the alleged impossibility of attaining any certainty in certain branches of knowledge. His few disciples sometimes curiously pose as the selectest band of modern thinkers, instead of perceiving that they are simply ridden by an idea that has lost its connexions. To another man the only discoverable God in the world is a general stream of tendency, and under that preconception he proceeds even to expound the Bible. It was not long before attention was called to the necessity, if his views were right, of interpreting even the Psalms (such passages, for instance, as "I cried unto Thee, O Lord ; I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living ") as an attempt of the writer to express, not devotion to a person, but satisfaction with a stream of tendency. A similar process has been applied to special doctrines and to isolated verses of Scripture. Sometimes a simple statement is eagerly elaborated into a sense, that cannot easily be recognised either as natural or as spiritual ; and sometimes a single statement is shut off from the whole of the rest of the body of truth, and invested with a disproportionate ascendancy that immediately becomes dangerous. Of the latter the sacerdotal superstitions are mostly instances ; whilst the former has led more than once to the multiplication of sects, and its influence can be traced through more than one chapter of early and mediæval, if not of modern, church history. So in the domain of religious practice. The older systems of monasticism, and the modern systems of direction—it is easy to quote Scripture in their

favour; but it will be generally found that the Scripture quoted has to be somewhat forced, and that the man must go onward from it a little before it will quite answer his purpose. The continuous and searching self-scrutiny, of which morbid self-suspicion is the natural result; the confidence that forgets its divine bases, and changes into presumption; the disdain of human methods and skill through an exaggerated or inconsiderate dependence upon divine inspiration and help; and many another blunder, into which men for lack of self-restraint allow themselves to drift, and which grievously reduces their influence with thoughtful men and their power for good in the world,—they are all different manifestations of the habit against which St. John warns us, all due to forgetfulness of the great rule that “every man that striveth” must be “temperate in all things.”

II. At the other extreme there is the equal, perhaps the more common fault of hanging back, and so, as the apostle teaches, gradually letting slip and losing every beneficent truth and every holy privilege we have gained. It is a fault that goes by many names,—half-heartedness, colourlessness, lack of principle, of decision, of earnestness; but there can be no doubt that it is one of the most prevalent defects in the modern Church, tending throughout the Christian world to destroy the force and very vitality of personal religion. Nor has it been by any means confined to the Christian world or to the present age. Historians have often remarked that at the commencement of the era it was one of the characteristics of the Romans, that they had lost all real faith in religion, regarded it as a matter chiefly of words and names, were simply annoyed at what they considered the meaningless discussions about it, and cared little either to propagate their own faith, or, until Christianity seemed to them a partially

political movement, to take cognisance of difficulties arising from other faiths. Our critics occasionally tell us that in some respects the Christian world at present is not far removed from that state of complete indifference to religious conceptions and motives. They say that a lack of tone and decisiveness is one of the symptoms of the present age,—always, let it be remembered, a symptom of weakness. The fashion is to hold opinions and views that are as colourless as possible, and carefully to refrain from committing oneself to anything; to remember that every question has “so many sides that life is not long enough for men to examine them all,” and that therefore a man should not venture to be positive about anything. Accordingly men compromise with obligation, hesitate in their allegiance to truth, and make a disposition to hang back, and a lack of thoroughness in opinion and in practice, the most prominent feature of their lives. There can be no question as to the effect. Of the mischief that is done in the world some one says that “one-third may be set down to the bad people who do it, two-thirds to the good people who allow it to be done.” The man who hangs back, permitting his convictions to become indefinite, and his sense of duty to die down into silent weakness, must in reason hold himself responsible for so much of the evil in the world as is done, because he provides the opportunity, or at least removes the hindrance. But that is not all. Let a man try to discover the reason why his progress in religion is so slow, why he does not throw off evil habits that have disturbed him for years, why his influence for good in his own neighbourhood is so limited and uncertain; and he will generally, though not always, find that the secret of it all is his own half-heartedness, the superficiality of his religion. He hangs back when the



opportunity for usefulness is open, refrains from protesting when sin is being done before his eyes, tries to combine the fear of God with some other quality that is repulsive to God, and treats that large section of Scripture that relates to the higher and more satisfying experiences of religion sometimes with neglect, sometimes with wonder, rarely as an integral part of the word of God to him. "For this cause"—dulness, the disposition to trim, imperfect sincerity—"many are weak and sickly, and many sleep."

III. Those being the faults at either extreme against which the apostle warns us, the conclusion is obvious, that the best and most perfect Christian life is one in which both are avoided, and the path midway between the two is trodden. The ideal Christian life, according to this old apostle, is one in which the progress of the fancy in regard to religious truth or duty is restrained by the reins of a sanctified reason, in which all backwardness is for ever prevented by thorough religious earnestness. There is a tendency at times to imagine that such matters are merely or mostly a question of temperament; that the vivacious man will be certain to go forward, and the languid man to hang back; and that neither can be held responsible for faults that arise from the peculiarities of their very natures. But that is not the way in which the Bible looks at the matter. It tells of a God whose grace can change almost the very temperament of a man, making him strong where he was weakest, enabling him to curb dispositions which resist every other restraint. The grace of God did that for Peter. To plead, therefore, personal temperament in excuse for the habit of over-eagerness or of backwardness, is to overlook the grace of God, the mightiest influence in the world upon human character, an influence which is ever

present and to be had by any man who really desires it. The better course is to bring to Christ every fault of temper or of disposition, and, resolutely striving to be rid of it, to make our efforts effectual by constant dependence upon Divine help. That is a method which has never yet failed to enable an impulsive man to restrain himself from over-eagerness, and a sluggish man to arouse himself to dutifulness ; and therefore of necessity it cannot fail in any case.

But it is well to look a little more closely at the reasonableness and advantage of maintaining this intermediate position between the two extremes. That it avoids on the one hand presumptuous positiveness concerning everything, and on the other the faltering that turns religious conviction and obligation into matters for compromise, is in itself a sufficient, but far from the only, commendation. It is also the course that should be adopted, the state of mind that is most defensible and helpful, in relation to the fluctuations of religious opinion and the controversies that periodically shake the kingdom of God. The question is, How ought such controversies to affect us? What attitude towards them ought we to assume? Ought we to yield to the charm of novelty, and accept the new conclusions eagerly, in spite of the imperfect proof on which they rest, and of all the uncertainty that clings to them? Or ought we to hang back from contact with any part of them, however fully demonstrated, and begin to tremble at the thought that the very foundations of our faith are being destroyed? To such questions both history and the wise counsel of this apostle give the same reply. Again and again religion, or the Bible, which is its inspiration and record, has been assailed ; and always the same over-eagerness on the one hand, and the same hesitating backwardness on the other, have embittered

the controversy and delayed its solution. The ultimate result, however, has never varied ; religion has come out of the strife in a purer form, freed from entanglements that had gathered about it, whilst the claim of the Bible to acceptance as the word of God has been strengthened, and thus far not a solitary revelation has disappeared from its pages. That was the case when in the sixteenth century religious faith had to vindicate itself amidst the revolution that was caused by new discoveries in astronomy, and again in the eighteenth century at the time of the uprising of the new geology. It has already once been the case in the present century, for certainly religion and the Bible do not seem to have lost anything in the biological revolution of the last generation. And all past history warrants the conclusion, that in due time the results of the present investigation of Scripture according to the methods of historical criticism will prove to be the same. The right attitude, therefore, is not that of hasty eagerness in grasping at the first conclusions, or of distrust and trembling, as though the temple of God was falling in pieces ; but that of the calm and undoubting faith, that the truth of the word of God will be found in some way to harmonise with every other truth, and that at the right moment God will bring into view all the connexions.

In the department of Christian service similarly, of the work for God which every man ought to be doing the whole of his lifetime, most men will agree that the best human qualifications for doing it well are not over-eagerness, still less backwardness, but steady earnestness or well-controlled zeal. The man who in his work hangs back, never manages to get much done ; and the man who is always apt to go a little too far forward, is also always apt to miss his mark,

and to awaken in others suspicions of his discretion that seriously weaken his influence. All experience seems to show that the strongest Christian man is not the man who throws himself away, whose over-eagerness makes him intolerant of slowness and incapable of waiting, in whom emotion is sovereign over reflection and outsteps it. The strongest man is he whose enthusiasm is disciplined by self-control, whose devotion to Christ is whole-hearted and well-nigh incapable of increase, but yet is closely regulated by a sanctified reason, and thus made provident of its resources and unalterable in its purposes. The men of Zebulun who went forth to battle are described as "expert in war," men who "could keep rank, they were not of double heart." The Chronicler repeats the statement of the qualifications a second time: "All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel." In all associated warfare or service, the perfect heart of devotion is good, but waste and failure follow unless there is also the power to keep rank. It was their "order," as well as the steadfastness of their faith in Christ, in which St. Paul expressed his joy when he wrote to the Colossians. That is the kind of Christian that is wanted to-day in the council-chambers of the Church, in its schools and the homes of its people—one who is prepared resolutely for love's sake to do his full duty, but is not to be drawn away from his own place in the array by the fears that bid him loiter or the deceits that tempt him onward.

But the teaching of the verse applies quite as much to personal religious life as it does to service or to opinions; and what it urges as the condition of swift progress to the highest spiritual attainments, is that the spirit and the life should be, as it were, ringed round with the teaching of

Christ, never advancing far forward from the neighbourhood of Him, never drifting far behind, but keeping day by day as closely as possible within the circle which His influence fills. The next phrase in the Epistle states accordingly, "He that abideth in the teaching of Christ, the same hath both the Father and the Son." And the Saviour Himself once said to His disciples, "Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." If thus the teaching of Christ leads to God and purifies the heart, vital union with Him ought to be the law and chiefest treasure of every life. That being so, the devout follower will neither "go onward," nor "lose the things that" he has "wrought." If he be tempted to advance beyond the Saviour, the master-passion of love for Him will hold him back; or if he be tempted to linger behind, the love will draw him on. A more blessed kind of life no man can conceive; and that becomes our kind of life, according as we crush out the disposition to regulate our ways in independence of Christ, and pour our hearts upon Him in continuous trustfulness. Thus we shall walk amidst temptation, difficulty, demands for swift choice, with the Saviour step by step teaching us the way, Himself leading us on towards the duties we have to do, and the attainments we have to reach, leading us up at last to the heaven over which He is Lord.



XII

The Law of No Compromise





## THE LAW OF NO COMPROMISE

Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us therefore go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.—HEB. xiii. 12, 13.

THE opening word refers back to the previous verses, and indicates with the context that, whilst Jesus completely fulfilled the symbolism of the sacrificial law, His sacrifice was accompanied by greater privileges than attended any Jewish offering for sin. In giving Himself to death He complied with every Levitical ritual regulation, and therefore the sufficiency of the sacrifice in itself is beyond question. At the same time, the results exceeded those of any ordinance that was known under the Jewish economy; and therefore there was ground for the appeal, that a man should separate himself from camp and city, from Judaism in its later shape of an organised polity and in its earlier form of a purer theocracy, and associate himself at once and for ever with Jesus, whatever the reproach. The historical statement upon which the appeal is based must be noticed first; and that will prepare us to listen to the appeal itself, even in the stern but necessary form which it assumes for men to-day.

I. That Jesus “suffered without the gate,” is not expressly stated in the gospels, but is more than once implied. For two of the evangelists refer to the procession of shame and

triumph that passed beyond the city boundaries, until it came to "Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull"; and the other two show that they knew all about it. It was a mark of ignominy which the persecutors of Christ tried to put upon Him, transformed by events into a distinction and a glory. The man who "blasphemed the name of the Lord," according to the old law, was to be put to death "without the camp"; and the same penalty was attached to the deliberate breach of the sanctity of the Sabbath, perhaps as involving substantially the same crime. A few years later, when Stephen was supposed to blaspheme in reporting his vision of the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, the people "ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city." And now upon Him, in whom the Father had pronounced Himself well-pleased, the doom of blasphemy is inflicted. He is cast out as unworthy the companionship of men, a scandal and disgrace to the community that expelled Him, unfit any longer to share in its fortunes or to be invested with its citizenship. It is true that from His cross, outside the camp of Judaism, He has exerted a moral influence, the parallel of which can be found nowhere; and that His next great journey was to be an ascension into heaven, into which He was received back by the Father whom He was supposed to have dishonoured. But, first of all, by the judicial voice of His nation, by the forcible will of His persecutors, He "suffered without the gate."

2. It does not seem to have been the intention of the Jews that this circumstance about our Lord's death should have been anything more than an additional humiliation. But God makes the wrath of man to praise Him; and the author of the Epistle at once connects this circumstance with customary ritual, and points to it as a fulfilment of the

law of sacrificial atonement. There were three cases in which the body of the victim offered in sacrifice was not afterwards eaten, but burnt without the camp, the sin-offering for the priest, that for the whole congregation, and the victims whose blood was sprinkled upon the mercy-seat on the great Day of Atonement. The reference in the twelfth verse to the blood makes it not unlikely that the allusion is principally to the last. But whichever of the three the writer is especially thinking about, there is no difference in his meaning. The type required the presentation to God of the life of the victim, the removal of its body outside the gate; and so Jesus passed sacrificially into heaven, and "suffered without the gate."

3. The purpose of it was "that He might sanctify the people with His own blood." There are two shades of meaning that may be traced in this word "sanctify." It denotes primarily to hallow and make meet for the enjoyment of the full privileges of covenant relationship with God; and inasmuch as Christianity recognises no holiness that is merely professional or ritual, it must mean also the actual cleansing of the spirit and its endowment with every grace and virtue. Christ does all that for a man. He puts him into a right attitude towards God; and He makes him pure in character, purpose, and motive. Is not that a sufficient fact upon which to base the advice, that a man should associate himself with Christ in every way? He is the perfect sin-offering, the continuous source of strength and peace and holiness for His people. As High Priest, He has entered within the veil, and we must seat ourselves in perpetual session with Him in heavenly places. As Victim, He suffered "without the camp," separated from all imperfect religions, from everything in the world that could

allure into evil ; and we too must "go forth unto Him," knitting ourselves to Him in utter devotion, despising "His reproach," glorying in the union which at the same time glorifies Him and perfects us.

II. For the Jews, however, the first readers of this Epistle, the appeal would take a slightly different form. It is difficult to read some of these verses without feeling that, in the opinion of the writer, the time was come for the final breach between Judaism and Christianity. Other parts of Scripture speak of the inadequacy of Judaism, and represent the observance of its rites as a matter of indifference. But this paragraph implies, not only that Christianity was richer in privilege than Judaism, and that the latter could therefore without serious loss be dispensed with, but that it ought now to be dispensed with. The changed teaching must be due to changed circumstances. One can easily imagine that the Jewish Christians began to be involved in serious peril through their fondness for the religion of their childhood, and through social and personal influences of the most formidable kind. On the one side, they would be plied with tempting suggestions, that Mosaism was still the divine rule of faith, appointed by God, and incapable of lapse or of supersession ; and on the other, they would find all the arrangements of the state and of society unfriendly to their new religion, and themselves practically excluded from every position of influence or even of social ease. The attempt to combine the two religions, always dangerous in itself, had now become well-nigh impossible in the face of the public opinion of the day. No longer could the alternative between the two masters be escaped ; but the injunction of Providence was as authoritative as Joshua's command to the tribes, "Choose you this day whom you will serve," the

Saviour who fulfilled the law, or the Law that is fulfilled and moribund and powerless to save. And a Christian had either to cease to be a Jew, or to cease to be a Christian. It was a difficult choice to make, as every one will acknowledge who knows anything of the strength of the ties of nationality, and kindred, and habit. On the one hand was the city, with all its traditions and memories, all its organised privileges, and friendships, and security; on the other hand, "without the gate," the absence of everything that attaches to a settled community of men, expatriation and exile. On the one hand was the camp, recalling some of the most magnificent achievements in their history, representing their fathers' religion in its purest and most attractive form; on the other hand the open country, alienation, and solitude, and homeless wandering. On the one hand was the synagogue, with its sacred treasure of the oracles of God, and all its closely-knit associations with worship and with hope; on the other hand was Christ, an outcast, and the disciples of Christ, a small body of persecuted and unpopular men. It was a difficult choice; and there is no cause of wonder that some of the believers were disposed to cast longing eyes upon the system and the nation they had been born in, to waver in devotion between the certain glories of the old faith, and what they might think the dubious fortunes of the new one. Yet the writer of this Epistle does not hesitate for a moment in his appeal. Away from camp and city stood the cross, a symbol of shame; but because he knew it was also the only means of sanctification, that the Crucified was the only Saviour, he points to Him and gives his words the intonation of an absolute confidence: "Let us therefore" renounce temple, and synagogue, and city, and "go forth unto Him, bearing His reproach."

The main lesson of the ~~verse~~ is in consequence evidently ~~this~~ that the time for compromise between Christianity and Judaism was over, that henceforth Christ must be without reserve all in all, and the Christian's attitude towards Judaism must be that of no compromise. We are not to-day in much danger of desiring to compromise with Judaism; but if Judaism was to be treated in this way, an inspired religion and a bond of nationality, there can be little doubt as to the form the appeal should assume as it rings through our own consciences. We must prefer union with Christ to anything which city or camp may offer us, esteeming His "reproach greater riches than the treasures in Egypt," separating ourselves from everything in the worldly system of things that tends to separate us from our Lord. To some men it may not be very palatable counsel, but it is none the less authoritative, to be found in many passages of Scripture besides this. From the world in its evil forms and influences we must resolutely go forth to our Saviour, refusing to compromise in regard to anything in religious truth or duty that is essential, and above all in regard to anything that is sinful in ourselves, persisting in all things in loyalty to Christ.

This law of no compromise has often been, and still sometimes is, grievously misunderstood; and it is not always welcome to men of a certain temperament, or to men who are destitute of strong religious convictions. ~~It does not~~ suit the easy-going. When they are angry, they are apt to call the man who follows it obstinate; just as when they are only critical, they call him ungenial. Weak men, however, in their petulance or their complacency, strong men in their assumed neutrality towards religions, have not hitherto shown themselves to be the best moral guides of their race.

Nor does it follow, because the law has been misapplied, that it has ceased to be binding. It is quite possible that it has been quoted as an excuse for monasticism, for seclusion, for the neglect and even the professed disdain of interest in the wonders of God's handiwork or in the associations and intimacies of pure society. But what a sincere man will be most anxious to find out is not the curious ways in which a moral law has been misinterpreted by others, but the precise range of its authority over himself, and the limits of his own obligation to obedience. In the present case there is little practical difficulty in deciding, provided that the eagerness to discover one's duty is not neutralised by a greater eagerness to find apologies for trifling with it. Evidently the sphere of compromise is that where the question is solely one of expediency, or utility, or degree of personal happiness; and the sphere of no compromise is that where the question is one of truth or right. If, for instance, when prudence only is in consideration, a man sees fit to renounce expected good for the sake of a greater or of a less good, his wisdom may be in fault or may be commended, but so far his morality has not presented itself for judgment. Conscience, on the other hand, is not prudence, but speaks with absolute authority, leaving a man no midway path between obedience and disobedience, requiring that he either do its behests or find himself convicted and self-condemned. For whenever God addresses Himself to man, whether through human faculty or the Spirit of His Son, and communicates His will, He permits no hesitation and no trimming, but expects man's feet immediately to "run the way" of His commandments. At times there may be doubt for a moment whether it is the voice of prudence or of conscience that is speaking, whether the occasion is one for compromise or for

loyalty; but if a man is careful to preserve the sanctities of truth and right, his sanctified wits will generally preserve him from going astray. And in all matters of morality and religion, whatever the apparent sacrifice involved and whatever the apparent issues, the right course is clearly to disregard personal liking and the opinion of others, and to imitate the immortal example of Him who said, "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me." "I delight to do  
L Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart."

Now it is precisely the absence of this spirit of no compromise with evil or wrong, that seems at present to be greatly weakening the influence of the Church, and holding Christians back from mastery over sin. One man, for example, tells us that the very tendency of the day is "to tame goodness and greatness out of their splendid passion, and stamp virtue itself into coinage of convenience"; and a man with whom goodness is not a passion never yet made much progress in personal religion, or effectually leavened his neighbours. Some one else says that "the fading away of religious purpose and passion is what Christians have to dread." How dreadful it is, probably every one knows, from some bitter experiences of his own. Truths about God, and self, and the future, once radiantly clear and certain, now dim; visions of grace or of glory, eclipsed by the earthly shadows we have allowed to drift across them; what Tennyson calls "lame hands of faith," where once faith was able to cling and climb, and shrank from no God-given duty; sin in ourselves, of temperament or desire, once ruthlessly rebuked and now parleyed with; a life which has ceased to be a grand devotion, and is gradually becoming a blundering effort to appease conscience at the least cost to ourselves, —most of us know, or at least suspect, the cause of it all.



Christ once said, "No man can serve two masters"; and we have been attempting the impossible task, with the necessary result that our religious assurances and purposes are declining, and our power against sin becoming less. This verse reminds us of the remedy, "Let us go forth to Christ without the camp." Separation, complete and inflexible, from whatever hinders godliness, in order that Christ may be to us actually all in all: that is the remedy recommended by the writer of this Epistle, and vindicated in the case of every one who has thoroughly tried it.

1. ~~But~~ let us look ~~more closely~~ at some of the applications of this law of no compromise. Apply it, first of all, to matters of religious truth; and it implies not bigotry of any kind or degree, but complete loyalty to our own convictions, with the full recognition of other people's equal right to theirs. Sir James Stephen once described truth as "the foe of falsehood, the antagonist of error, the exorcist of ambiguity"; and no man can afford to trifle with anything that answers such a description. Whatever is truth to a man ought to be sacred to him, commanding his unfaltering allegiance, something for which he is prepared to argue and with which he is resolved not to part without due reason. If that is the case with ordinary truths, how much more certainly is it in regard to those upon which religion is based, and by whose influence it is nourished! To ignore, renounce, or compromise religious convictions, truths about God or holiness which are known to bear directly upon religious experience and progress, for the sake of comfort or even for the sake of external ecclesiastical union,—it is clearly a policy of weakness, from which no good results for ourselves or for others can reasonably be expected. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," and "In

understanding be men," are the twin counsels of an apostle who was ready enough to recognise every claim that others could make upon him, but who was so unwilling to dilute or pervert the Gospel of Christ that he once said with some emphasis, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." Evidently the New Testament allows no compromise in regard to the essential truths of the Christian faith. A Christian must hold them and hold to them for Christ's sake, whether he be reproached as narrow, old-fashioned, unbending, or any of the other familiar adjectives be thrown at him.

2. In practical matters of business, recreation, social life, the application of this law is perhaps even more frequently neglected, as it is certainly sometimes more difficult. For in many natures there seems to be a strong tendency to do as others do; and even in regard to doubtful things, in business or in amusement, a well-meaning man may occasionally be heard pleading that we must do as others do. If a man had neither intelligence nor sense of right, it might be possible to understand the necessity. But to imagine a man with a mind of his own and a conscience of his own allowing his practice and friendships and personal habits to be determined by the opinions or the ways of other men—the imagination seems hardly capable of such an effort; and yet the cases are so frequent, that a close observer of life once pronounced "sliding into the pleasureless yielding to the small solicitations of circumstance a commoner history of perdition than any single momentous bargain." It is a fatal course in any form, alike to peace and to anything like ripe experience in religion, and tends indeed even to discredit religion itself. Concerning, for instance, that large class of

amusements in regard to which the Christian conscience is not altogether easy, a worldly man will sometimes try to entangle us in them by pleading that there is nothing wrong in them ; and then, if he succeeds, will sneer with half-contemptuous pity at our weakness in yielding to him, and at the weakness of what we call our religion. He at least knows that both the atmosphere and the example are wrong, the former full of excitement and danger, the latter apt to beguile the young and unwary ; and that it is a safe ethical rule not to play with fire. Christian morality goes even a step further by teaching that a thing may be actually right in itself and yet not right for us, if our indulgence in it would involve a breach of the law of charity, and imperil any soul for which Christ died. So with the question of personal intimacies,—there are cases where the authority of Christ warrants us not to cherish resentment or to break out into needless passion, but to count a man as “a heathen man and a publican” ; and there are cases concerning which St. Paul asks the natural question, “What fellowship have righteousness and iniquity ? And what concord hath Christ with Belial ?” For the social unity at which Christianity subordinately aims, is to be a unity by comprehension, when all men will be one because every man has consented in his heart to be wrapped in the embrace of the common Saviour. Union by compromise, on the other hand, is alien to the whole spirit of the New Testament, which in more than one way points to whatever in man or practice is sinful, and says imperially, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch no unclean thing ; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to Me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

3. But there is one province in which this law of no

compromise must receive even more stern and persistent application. For the greatest hindrance to the progress of the Christian lies after all in himself; and not until his evil self has been annihilated, will the object of religious discipline be reached, or the righteousness of the spirit become complete. This evil self, what Solomon, in his great prayer (1 Kings viii. 38), called the plague of a man's own heart, every one probably would acknowledge that it gives him more trouble than anything else—in the form of some ill temper, or of some seemingly almost unconquerable besetment. Discontent or petulance, jealousy or resentment, indolence or habit of waste, or some other foul passion or hampering vice, now and then suppressed for a moment, but quickly breaking out again and refusing to be slain: the most difficult and the most indispensable business every man has to do is to crucify that old self, “with the affections and lusts.” The kind of life we long for, on the other hand, is not merely in occasional rapture to throw ourselves at God's feet, but to live there in unceasing devotion, to be able always to say in sincerity, “I am Thine, wholly and for ever, to live for Thee or to die to Thee, as Thou wilt”—to have the whole self transformed, sin and weakness gone, and replaced by virtue and strength and the whole company of the graces of the Spirit. How can we manage it? The first necessity, an absolute necessity which we cannot in any way reduce or evade, is the utmost possible severity in dealing with sin in ourselves, ruthless and implacable severity even. The tendencies to make excuse, or to deal leniently, or to subdue sin by degrees and master the evil self in detail—we must reserve all that for use in our connexion with other men; but the man who trifles with sin in himself, and tries to ease his conscience with compromises, simply dooms

himself to peacelessness and failure. Bunyan tells how, when Christian saw Apollyon before him "bestraddling the pathway," he did not begin to propose conditions of amity and alliance, but immediately in the name of God "felt for his sword." Because of the absence of any disposition to compromise with sin and the presence of a very firm purpose to be rid of it, he was able before long to raise the shout of victory, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy ; when I fall, I shall arise" : "In all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." For ourselves also, that is the only road to success against sin,—not to play with it, trying to find out how far we can go without fatally grieving God, but to crush down and stamp out its very germs and beginnings, and in all its forms to refuse to give it any quarter at all. Sometimes in our hymns we ask God for "a quick discerning eye, The first approach of sin to feel" ; and sometimes for

A principle within  
Of jealous, godly fear,  
A sensibility of sin,  
A pain to feel it near :

and it is the fundamental condition of the mastery of evil, that the will should be so resolute against it and the conscience so sensitive and quick, that "the least omission" drives us at once to "the blood which makes the wounded whole."

Thus consistently and completely to apply this law of no compromise, cannot be effected by the action of the human will alone ; but it can easily be done by the power arising from the inspiration of Jesus and from His constant presence with us. The reproach that may follow is not at the present day of a serious character ; for it is difficult to suppose that a man of any sincerity cares much about what he is unjustly

called. There is a passage, indeed, in one of the Epistles of St. Peter, which suggests that such a reproach is, in the economy of grace, itself transformed into a source of strength and righteousness: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, because the Spirit of Glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you." If that be so, that firmness against sin brings down upon us in glory the Almighty Spirit of God, the refusal to compromise is worth all the pain it may cost, and is irresistible and certain in its sanctifying results. Separating ourselves from the sins that trouble us, and binding ourselves to Christ in unlimited devotion, those sins will not be able to follow us into our condition of fellowship with Him. "When Satan cometh," the shadow of the cross will bar his approach; and out of our hearts will disappear, slowly it may be, but certainly, everything to which sin could appeal. And we who for Christ's sake leave city and camp, and count association with Him better and worthier than aught else, shall find ourselves, by the grace of God strong (2 Cor. xii. 10) for resistance and strong for attainment, and at last shall receive "the crown of life" (Jas. i. 12), the promised reward of those who for the love of Christ "endure temptation."

XIII

## The Source of Power





## THE SOURCE OF POWER

Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you : but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.—LUKE xxiv. 49.

A PART of this verse is purely local and temporary in its character. The days the disciples spent in waiting, between the Ascension and Pentecost, have been made the subject of one of the most inspiring bits of devotional literature in the language ; but whilst we may wisely drink of the fountain of their inspiration, and imitate the constancy of their trust, there is no need now for any week-long tarrying in relation to any spiritual gift. The merciful rule, for endowment and for privilege, is now, not “Tarry ye,” but “Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find,” with no necessary interval between the setting-out of the seeker and the reward of his quest. The reference to Jerusalem is of even less general importance. It was the will of God, as the forty-seventh verse teaches, that the preaching of “repentance and remission of sins” should begin at Jerusalem. There spiritual gifts were to be granted first of all, perhaps because the discipline of Judaism was, notwithstanding all the faults that at this distance of time can be found in it, the fittest of all religions to prepare men to receive them. But thence, as the same verse indicated, they were to spread “among all nations,” until every spot on earth became what it is to-day, a suitable place for communion with God, from which man’s

heart may stream in devotion to Him, and upon which His quickening grace may descend in response. No truth in religion is more certain than that, or more uniformly evidenced in personal experience. Jerusalem has become "the town without walls," that Zechariah saw in his vision; and the Spirit of God recognises no limitations of local sanctity, but, filling the whole earth with His presence, is ready to bestow His special grace anywhere upon any heart that is eager to receive it.

If all these little allusions be passed over without any doubtful attempt to spiritualise them, and left to occupy undisturbedly the corner in religious history to which no one can dispute their title, the verse will be found to convey several lessons that require no disentanglement. Viewed historically, the marvellous fulfilment of the promise contained in it should encourage us to look for a similar fulfilment in our own lives; and viewed generally, it is a revelation of personal duty, and of the only means by which the duty can be faithfully done.

I. In its direct application to the Apostles, it teaches in conjunction with the previous verses that their distinctive work as Apostles was to bear witness of the sufferings of Christ and of His resurrection from the dead, and of what they had actually seen and knew of the effects of preaching in His name. That fact has been used more than once, and effectively used, to oppose the sacerdotal and exclusive pretences, that are based upon an alleged but indemonstrable succession from the Apostles, and upon the attribution to them of prerogatives they never possessed. It is significant enough that the Apostles nowhere in Scripture claim to be priests in any other sense than that in which the whole body of believers are priests, nowhere claim any exceptional near-

ness of fellowship with Christ closer than that which is open to every disciple. They were able to work miracles, and so were others. They communicated the grace of ordination, but not as a prerogative peculiar to themselves beyond what was necessary for the maintenance of order in the Church, or unpossessed by any outside the original apostolical circle. It was a layman who ordained the greatest of the Apostles, and furnished thereby in anticipation a fatal objection to the theory that makes direct succession in office from the Apostles indispensable to the validity of so-called orders. Their specific work as apostles seems to have been nothing more than that of bearing historical witness to Christ; and the most apostolical passage in the New Testament is probably the opening sentence of St. John's First Epistle: "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, . . . declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." St. Peter himself defined the qualification of an apostle as being that he must "have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us"; and the function of an apostle as being, that he must "be a witness with us of His resurrection." A book, which attained a great, if brief, popularity a few years ago, represented a man as renouncing Christianity apparently upon the single ground of an alleged insufficiency of evidence, historical and textual, as though the Christian faith had no other foundation than that. The evidence however begins with the testimony of twelve eye-witnesses, who were about as different in their temperaments as twelve men can be, and almost every one of whom died for his faith; and therefore the first link in the chain cannot reasonably be regarded as weak.

To form an adequate idea of the difficulties that confronted these Apostles in their endeavour to do their duty of witnessing to Christ, is in the present condition of social life almost impossible. Wherever they went, they were opposed by public opinion, by the traditions and interests of every grade of society, by the zeal of the fervid and the indifference of the careless, by powerful instincts, by the ties of kinship and the sanctities of the home, by the wisdom of every land and by the dulness of every mind. From almost everything which they had been taught in the impressible years of life to cherish, they had to break free. Poor and unfriended, they had to take the constant risk, not only of persecution in an age that was suspicious of differences of conviction though tolerant of differences of view, but even of every most pitiless kind of martyrdom. Nor do they seem to have been on the whole men of any special ability or character. One of them was a man of some culture according to a provincial standard, but he laboured under the disqualification of great bodily weakness, if not also of some impediment in speech. But the average of the entire band, as far as natural capacity goes, cannot have been much above that of any similar number of men chosen haphazard out of the streets. Humanly speaking, there was no likelihood at all that men of such a stamp would be able to face the dominant civilisations and religions of the world, and to maintain and vindicate their testimony against the influences of them all. More than once the heart of the ablest of them was on the point of sinking, in the consciousness that his enterprise was entirely out of proportion to his strength; and that consciousness appears to have never quite left him. After he had had long years' experience of the grace of God, and proofs innumerable of what the presence of the Divine Spirit can

empower a man to do, he checks his thanksgiving that to some he was proving "the savour of life unto life," in order to give utterance to the anxious wonder that would no longer consent to be repressed—"Who is sufficient for these things?" "I laboured more abundantly than they all," he says in another place, but immediately adds in his sense of absolute personal impotence, "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." A dozen weak men to turn the tide of the whole world's thought and morals,—if ever there has been a case of a cause and effect apparently out of all correspondence, that seems to be it.

But the explanation is well known to every Christian, and not to be satisfactorily evaded by any unchristian student of history. These men needed special help to do the work which God had assigned them to do; and so of necessity, for that is always the manner of our God, the special help was given. It had been promised them time after time by their Lord. On the last evening that He spent with them before His betrayal and death, there was no promise to which He recurred more frequently, as though His love could not be satisfied by the most diverse and emphatic assurances. And the Acts of the Apostles in every chapter shows how from the beginning the promise was kept and richly fulfilled. An interval of but a few days separates the opening incidents of that book from the closing words of the Gospels; but during that interval the Apostles, still waiting for something more, were exposed to a transforming force that made of them entirely different men. A week or two ago the most charitable thing that could be said about them was that "they all forsook" their Master and fled: now, in obedience to a voice that has become for ever still, they are able to bear disappointment and delay, and day after day they

continue "all with one accord in prayer and supplication." As soon as they heard "a sound as of a rushing mighty wind," and "cloven tongues like as of fire" appeared to them, and the awful influence swept through them, purging and quickening them, they could face the mixed and heated multitudes in the streets of Jerusalem, and so testify that "the same day about three thousand souls" passed on from Moses to Christ. Peter on the night of the betrayal was frightened into lying protestation by the casual gossip of a maid-servant; but shortly after he was able at the bar of the angry Sanhedrin to beard the ecclesiastical chiefs of his nation, and refused with disdain to modify or to conceal his convictions. Contemptuously rejecting the policy of silence that was urged upon him with threats, he said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." St. Luke accounts for the firmness of the once hasty and inconstant Apostle by the statement that Peter was "filled with the Holy Ghost"; and there is certainly no other power than that of the Spirit of God that has hitherto been able to effect such a change. Paul too was a man of delicate health, pressed by poverty and need, weak in bodily presence and "contemptible" in speech, often burdened with the hindrances to perfection in himself and with the wreck of the good work he seemed to have succeeded in doing, yet doggedly pursuing amidst perplexity and pain his mission "to preach the gospel," allowing no subtlety or fierceness of temptation to silence the testimony upon his lips, and at last dying in glorious shame because he would not deny his Lord; and whatever the tenacity of the human will, it is only by ignoring the limitations of human nature that the secret of such a life can be

found in its original resources. He too was "endued with power" by the Spirit of God ; or else his career is a mystery, of which no solution can be discovered. Similarly with the other Apostles. What they did, and where they witnessed, except in regard to one or two of them, no one knows for certain. Old traditions represent them as carrying their testimony northwards and eastwards, everywhere winning converts and defying opposition, and at last with few exceptions as sealing their evidence with martyrdom. The one thing that is true about every one of them is that he was "endued with power" by the descent upon him of the promise of the Father, and thereby enabled to get his work of witnessing effectively done.

II. There is no sufficient reason for confining to the Apostles the main teaching of this passage. It applies as directly to, and is as true for, Christians at the present day, as it was for them. For the New Testament forbids anything like the assumption that the Apostles stood in an exceptional relation to the promise of the Father, or were privileged to receive a degree of power in which we are incompetent to share. That we, like they, have to bear witness to our Saviour, is frequently taught by Christ Himself. Calling to His aid every kind of beautiful imagery, He sets forth that a man's religion must not be concealed and secret, hidden "under a bushel," but confessed and gloried in, visible from afar like a city set on a hill, or at least visible at hand like a candle that gives "light to all that are in the house." By direct testimony, and by the evidence of a quiet and quickening life, we have to let the men around us know that there is at least one power in the world that can rid them of sin, and make them dutiful and pure. On one occasion, indeed, the Lord took a poor sinner

who was tormented by a legion of devils, and after healing him, sent him off home straightway to tell his friends of the mighty love he had met with. In the morning he was a naked madman, in the evening a faithful witness for Christ. In some such sense the distinctive work even of the Apostles may be said to have devolved upon every Christian. They had to tell men what they had learned concerning their Saviour by means of eye and ear as well as of heart and soul; and now that the testimony of the senses is no longer possible, we have to tell men what we know concerning Him by actual experience, and so to regulate our speech and our silences, our habits and our influence, that the whole life becomes a witness to Christ's power to sanctify and save.

Are we doing that? A witness to Christ everywhere and in everything—no man and no method of living can be supposed to correspond with Christ's ideal, unless they answer that description. It means obviously that religion must be put first and kept first throughout, so that its influences determine and control all others, and decide the way in which every relation is filled, and reveal themselves unmistakably, if unobtrusively, to others. Proper witnessing requires, therefore, in the first place, that a Christian be loyal in speech and act to his convictions, neither shrouding them in silence, nor shrinking from their due avowal. It is true that positiveness in regard to matters of religious opinion is sometimes pronounced a mark of deficient culture, and its expression deprecated as unamiable or impolite. The spirit and temper of the age are said to be more congruous with nebulosity, hesitation, doubt, the concealment of any real belief a man may hold, an attitude of impassioned neutrality towards all conceptions of the supernatural. But a course



or policy of such feebleness is sufficiently condemned by intellectual sincerity alone, apart from considerations of Christian morality, which of course does not tolerate it for a moment. For if it be possible to imagine a man possessed of intellectual powers, but destitute of a conscience, he would find himself impelled to seek some certainty on subjects that lie at the basis of religion, for many reasons—because his interests might be directly and materially affected thereby, because from every side mystery and problem would press upon him for investigation, because no intelligence can be really satisfied with doubts that are born merely of intellectual negligence. Attaining such certainty, a cynic might try to misrepresent it or to enjoy it in secret; a lover of truth would be more disposed to proclaim it from the housetop. With a man, on the other hand, who has both a mind and a conscience, every power of his soul will urge him to put himself into a condition of full persuasion, in which he can bear his hearty testimony on the one side or the other. The first qualification of a faithful witness to Christ is the possession of cherished convictions about Him, which a man may have won with difficulty and struggle, but which he is prepared with modesty to assert and with resolution to maintain. Flabbiness of thought and tremulousness of utterance, if in the opinion of its satirizers they meet with the approval of modern society, are entirely out of place in the Church, and impossible to a man who really lives within the shadow of the Cross. Not the renunciation or the repression of Christian beliefs, because of the prevalence of various shades of sentiment and view, or because of the standing rebuke which the worldly find in the gospel, is what sincerity commands and obligation to Christ enjoins, but the unfaltering exhibition of our own faith, together

with respect for every man's right to form conclusions of his own. A great theologian recently expressed the opinion<sup>1</sup> that "the atonement forms to-day a very subordinate part of preaching." He attributes that feature of the modern pulpit to the "false emphasis" that was previously laid upon the doctrine, and ventures to think "that this extreme recoil accounts for much of the paralysis which seems to have fallen upon Christian effort." The remedy is obvious. We who believe in the atonement, and have no other hope in the sight of God than that which arises from the fact that Christ died for us, must bear our witness to it, and tell men, on the authority of our own experience, whether it be palatable to them or not, that Christ "bare our sins in His body on the tree." Similarly with every other religious belief. Christians who have the courage of their convictions, and steadfastly witness to what they have experienced of the grace of God—that is a method which is in accord with the scientific spirit of the age, and must in due time lead to its consecration; a duty whose discharge the Saviour asks from every disciple.

But to witness for Christ means much more than the right co-ordination of speech with belief. Religion must be allowed or made to dominate the entire practice, no restraints being placed upon its range, and no distinction forced between sacred and secular functions or spheres. Its rule must cover the whole of life and all its relationships, domestic and civil, everything in it and the central spirit of it all becoming a testimony to the grace and righteousness of Christ. Thus

<sup>1</sup> *The Spiritual World*, by Alfred Cave, D.D., pp. 192, ff. Here are two sentences worth pondering: "There are spiritual convictions in sinful and estranged man which only the blood of Jesus can allay. The Cross of Christ is the finest instrument for giving peace of mind to the awakened sinner."

to live is difficult enough, not from the same causes precisely as in the case of the apostles, but from strong tendencies within a man, subtle and constant temptation from without. Christian thoroughness is the object aimed at; and though public opinion may not be at heart out of sympathy with it, there can be no doubt that in some circles it professes to be, and perhaps it assumes a tone of greater animosity under the necessity of simulation which fear and false shame force upon it. For whatever men's actual feelings may be, they are apt in company or association to indicate an impatience of anything that is evangelical in sentiment, a disdain of religion in any other form than that of a customary ritual acting almost mechanically as a safeguard of decency and order. In some such sterilising climate, where nearly all influences are hostile to sincerity and to inwardness, the work of Christian witnessing has to be done; and the men who have to do it are themselves conscious of many a spiritual weakness, of imperfect knowledge and aptitude to err, of dulled sensibility, of the enfeebling fear that completeness of service and perfection of character are alike impracticable. And yet it has to be done. "Ye are witnesses of these things," is still the word of Christ to His disciples, and upon them rests the irreducible obligation to walk worthily of their vocation, and to make their walk an unceasing testimony to their Lord. In society to refrain from grieving the Spirit by yielding to small solicitations, and to exert one's influence uniformly in favour of truth and purity; in civil life—the home, the place of business, the voting-booth, the council-chamber—to keep religious considerations in their proper position of authority, and in cases of conflict to compel everything else to give way; in every relation and every experience to walk "as it becometh the gospel of Christ,"

witnessing on the one hand to the power of His grace, and on the other appealing to men to worship Him—that is the kind of life to which the New Testament summons every disciple, and with anything short of which it must of necessity be unsatisfied.

Can we manage that? or rather, as it must in some way be done, How can we manage it? Every man knows, from the moral experiments he has himself made, that in human nature itself there are to be found no means by which such a life can be lived; that reliance upon personal wisdom and strength alone always leads quickly to the faltering and discredit of the witness. Have we any other resource? Listen to a word written centuries ago by an old prophet from the lips of Jehovah: “It shall come to pass that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. . . . And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit.” The sons and the daughters prophesying—the influence of the Holy Spirit streaming down upon every servant of the Lord and upon every handmaid: this day, and every day, is the great promise fulfilled before our eyes; and the weakest Christian, undergoing that baptism, will be stronger than temptation, and able so to administer and regulate his life that every part of it becomes a witness to God. Nor are we by any means shut up to that single and well-used passage. In the text Christ Himself undertakes that we shall be “endued with power,” or, as it is put in the Revised Version, “clothed with power from on high.” “Clothed with power,” so that wherever we go, we carry irresistible strength with us and upon us; and whatever duty has to be done, or resistance to be endured or overcome, we can do it easily in virtue of that divine clothing. There

is therefore no need to sing any more, "For power I feebly pray," that may be kept for moments of sickness or physical depression, when we can lift ourselves up to nothing better. We may even venture to go beyond "Calmly we wait the promised grace," and to claim with confidence "the Pentecostal powers, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." The continuous raining down of that gracious shower will cleanse from sin, fertilise every germ of godliness, nerve and equip for every duty. There is a well-reasoned passage in one of the books of that interesting man, Lawrence Oliphant. "There is a promise," he begins, "that 'greater works than these shall they do who believe.'" Now, he says in substance, I want to know why those greater works have never been done, never even attempted. He is quite competent to answer the question himself. It is, he says, because men cannot face the severe training which the perfecting of self-sacrifice involves; because they either give themselves up to a discipline that is mediæval and misdirected, or regard the discipline as itself the end; because they will not value and cultivate the spiritual forces that are latent in humanity, and powerful enough to restore the world; because they insist upon forgetting that they are dependent for movement and effectiveness of every kind upon the living breath of the Spirit of God within them. Therein probably lies the chief secret of every success and of every failure in the Christian service of witness. The way to the witness-box lies through the upper chamber. First of all we must get (every Christian knows how) the abundant unction, and then we can go down, if need be, into all life's places of worst peril, and witness to Christ without hesitancy or failure or sin.

For this promise touches upon that matter of sin itself, as well as upon all the less hindrances to witnessing; it both

offers and brings within our reach an inbreathed power that can make us masters of sin. That the longing for such mastery is of all human desires the deepest and most abiding few would be disposed to deny. There are other desires which are excellent, and which must not lightly be frustrated or renounced,—desires for knowledge, for health, for influence; and unduly to cross or sacrifice these is to be unjust to oneself and to the capabilities with which God has invested human nature. The better the mind is informed and trained, the more alert it is, and the more abundantly equipped with the discoveries of research and the conclusions of philosophy, the more full and convincing will be its witness to the glory of that Christ, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” The more complete a man’s sanctified health becomes, and the greater his pure influence over others, the larger is his opportunity of turning their hearts. But none of these desires can compare, in intensity or in the frequency of recurrence, with the desire for power against sin. There are moods and experiences, familiar to most men, when everything else would be readily parted with, if thereby that might be secured. The whole economy of redemption appears to have been devised in order that it might be obtained. The worst sinner coming to God through Christ, coming with his whole heart and soul, the moment he comes is forgiven. Trusting in Christ still, he is fulfilling the one condition upon which the Spirit of God is given; and in proportion to his trust, to its sincerity and completeness, is the measure of the Spirit’s influence which he receives. What will the result be? Thus saith the Lord, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground”; and so every need of the soul will be met, every germ of good within it

encouraged to grow, until it is clothed with the fruitage of all the virtues. Or, as it is put in the text, "I send the promise of My Father upon you,"—upon head, heart, will, every part of the nature, sanctifying the whole. The perfected sanctification is sometimes the end of a long process; and in that sense we have, like the Apostles, to "tarry" for it, to trust and to pray. But if we only so trust that the Spirit can have His own way with us, the process will be quickened, weaknesses will fall away from us, and the witness of the pure spirit will be well-pleasing to God and irresistible by men.





XIV

## The Vision of God



## THE VISION OF GOD.

He said, I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory.—Ex. xxxiii. 18.

IN mystery, and to some extent also in sanctity, the part of the history of the Exodus related in these chapters stands distinctly above the rest. It is a revelation, clearer and more full than any preceding one, of the graciousness and of the authority of Jehovah; and it is a revelation also of the extent to which human nature, under such religious influences as are recognised even in the Old Testament, is capable of perfecting. Part of the story has found its way, with the usual modifications, into the sacred books of the Mohammedans. The incident supplied the locality where it is supposed to have occurred with its traditional name: and in all ages art and fancy have busied themselves with it. Christian thinkers it has attracted by a twofold interest, as marking the highest point to which human mediation can rise, and as in some sense foreshadowing that greater act of substitution and self-sacrifice, by which the sin of the world was taken away.

The incident itself can be traced rapidly through its separate stages, though at several of them difficulties of moment arise. Moses had been spending some days upon the Mount in close communion with Jehovah, awed by the sanctities of His presence, receiving His directions concerning worship and duty. Meanwhile the people had returned to the lewd and disgraceful idolatry which they had met with in Egypt,

and, assisted if not incited by Aaron himself, had chosen to dance shamelessly about a golden calf rather than to obey their absent leader and to be grateful to their Deliverer and God. Their folly in the camp so stirred the indignation of Moses when he saw it, that, jealous for the honour of Jehovah, he hastily cast out of his hands the two God-written tables of the law, and broke them in pieces. It was a righteous act, and one which Scripture nowhere censures. The people were not worthy the gift; and the opportunity of possessing it and its loss through their own sin are afterwards (Deut. ix. 15-17) referred to as entering into the discipline by which God sought to train them. To bring laws, written by the finger of God, and therefore of authority beyond suspicion, to people who were dancing half-naked before the foolish figure of a calf, and imagining it to be divine,—no wisdom could approve such an instance of casting pearls before swine. Then followed first a brief interview with Aaron, in which all his helplessness and weakness came out clearly, and next the swift punishment of the men who were dishonouring God. Taking his post “in the gate of the camp,” Moses called to the people, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Let him come unto me.” Around him quickly gathered the Levites, who were commanded to pass through the camp “from gate to gate,” and to “slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.” It was a severe and terrible thing to do,—to send men straight from the excitements of a lascivious idolatry to the judgment-seat of God; but a ruler in times of crisis, especially when the fundamental obligations of religion are being set at nought, must be prepared to punish as well as to pardon. It is more merciful to startle by sharp penalty the bulk of a nation into thought-

fulness, than to let the contagion of a carnal idolatry sweep them all into perdition. And the consequences of the severity were, as the context itself shows, to prompt Moses to one of the most wonderful acts of mediation recorded in history, and to avert from the people the wrath of God that had waxed hot against them.

The first step Moses takes is to return to Jehovah, and to appeal to Him with the largest plea which it is possible for man to make. "This people," he says, "have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold: yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—" That sentence has never been completed, and does not need to be, for the dullest man can imagine the unspeakable thought that was in the speaker's mind. "If not," he continues, "blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." There is scarcely anything like that in the records of the race. In the faith of Moses, according to one of the best of the commentators, the book of God "contains the list of the righteous, and ensures to those whose names are written therein life before God, first of all in His earthly kingdom, and then eternal life also." The men in legend or story, who have been ready to sacrifice themselves for their country's weal, have had no similar conception of the religious and ultimate effects of such sacrifice upon themselves. Christ did more than Moses, inasmuch as He first of all made Himself a member of the race whose guilt He was willing to bear. The great saying, "I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake," shows that the heart of St. Paul was capable of as much. But it would not be easy to name a third who could be placed side by side with the magnificent pair, ready for their people's sake "to be cut off from covenant hope and privi-

lege," and to undergo the doom that follows the just wrath of God against sin. It is, however, a divine law, necessary in the interests of effective government, that "none can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Consequently, all that could be granted Moses was a restraint and postponement of punishment, with the opportunities thereby afforded for repentance and amendment. And God renews His covenant with the people, with at least one significant change in its terms, and with a final phrase full of terror, "I will not go up in the midst of thee" (xxxiii. 3): "behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them" (xxxii. 34).

Whilst that was the result of the incident as far as the people were concerned, its effects upon Moses are clearly traceable in the later history. The sacrifice of self indeed, whenever it is sincere and high-principled, whatever other qualities attach to it, appears always to exalt the moral nature of a man, improving his conceptions of God, and making him more sensitive to influences from above. In the case of Moses its effect was at once fitness for the enjoyment of a privilege, than which a greater has rarely been granted to man. "The Lord spake unto Moses," says the eleventh verse, "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend"; and more sanctifying communion than that can hardly be conceived. The next paragraph was possibly intended to illustrate the intercourse to which God admitted His servant, its reverent boldness on the one side and its bounty on the other, though there is some difficulty in following the processes of thought through some of the phrases. The three petitions appear to be arranged in an ascending scale of magnitude. First of all, Moses prays,

“Shew me Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight”; and the response is, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” Then he pleads, “Wherein shall it be known that I have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us?”—*i.e.* Make it evident that Thy goodwill is resting upon me and upon my work; let there be some obvious token that my method of leading these tribes, and even my sternness against their sins, are according to Thy will; and let that token be the manifestation of Thy presence with us. Again the gracious answer comes, “I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken.” Then the great hero prayed, encouraged by his success to venture perhaps farther than any man had ever gone before, “I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory”—the unveiled radiance of Thy majesty, apart from semblance or similitude, the Godhead as it is, let me once see it and live.

I. There is no difficulty in understanding the causes of such a longing on the part of Moses, though it is not so easy to enumerate and classify the causes of a similar longing amongst ourselves. He, like everybody else, must have been subject to occasional doubt and depression; and these tendencies in his case would sometimes be the more irresistible, because of the burden of the work which he had to bear almost alone. On the Mount, in a condition of religious exaltation, he had been taught of God the arrangements of the Tabernacle and the ritual of its services. As a lawgiver, familiar with the idea of authority, he would be eager at times to get behind human institutions, behind even the divine voice that proclaimed them, to the primal source of all power and law. And at a moment like this, when he had just completed a part of the code upon which

he had been exclusively engaged for weeks, and when the renewed idolatry of the people must have made him feel the improbability that they would be readily led to obedience, his own weariness, the reaction upon his spirits from the intense religious concentration in which he had lived so long, and a growing sense of the hopelessness of the task he had undertaken, must have made him long intensely for some such all-convincing vision of Jehovah, as should dispel every fear and harden his baffled purpose into invincibility. When he saw in the camp "the calf and the dancing," he must have been tempted to consider the work of his life as broken and hopeless, he needed, and felt the need, and under its pressure prayed for a specially privileged revelation of God, in order that he might gather up the fragments of his work and begin it again.

The same longing is no stranger to men to-day, although its causes may be very different. Most persons indeed pass more than once through some such experience as the following. With innumerable things in life to make us happy,—the green fields and the blue sky and the glory of the flowers, a quiet home, a steady pulse, a sphere of service, a thousand joys of friendship, of leisure, of duty; there is yet an abiding consciousness that something is wanting to the completeness of our lives. The name by which we call that something varies according to the aspect in which it is regarded; but whether it takes the form of peace with conscience, of unquestioning conviction of the love of God, or of absolute faith in the future, it is always in reality a religious element of knowledge or of experience for which we yearn, and for which we continue to yearn until the Holy Spirit leads us into peace. Even after a man has become familiar through the grace of God with the assur-



ance of faith, how constantly this longing recurs in moods of penitence, of perplexity, of aspiration, and of worship! The actual vision, though but for a moment, of God in His glory,—to see in His majesty Him who is the fountain of all authority and law, the Creator of matter and force, the Designer and Lord of the universe; desire presses importunately through all intermediate stages up even to that crowning bliss. When we have consecrated the sciences, and by means of physics and of metaphysics have won a brief sight of the trailing clouds of majesty that sweep after God everywhere as He passes by, and even by long pondering have almost caught a glimpse of some of His solitary attributes,—not even that can satisfy us. What we want, now and again, is a vision of the face of God, sometimes from curiosity, sometimes with the hope that such a sight will for ever kill doubt and make us triumphant over all temptation, sometimes in sorrow, sometimes in the elevation and rapture of absorbed devotion. And the knowledge of the distance that separates God in nature from ourselves, and of the impossibility that such a desire can in this life be gratified, is not able to suppress the longing, and to lead us to submit in contentment to the limitations which our very humanity involves.

II. If we turn from the irrepressible desire as felt by man to the use which God in His discipline makes of it, the next paragraph shows how, in the case of Moses, it was granted in part, and in part refused. He was commanded to ascend Mount Sinai again alone. Not a man was to be “seen throughout all the mount,” nor the flocks and herds to feed before it. Standing there in that sacred and still loneliness, covered by the Divine hand, and shut up “in a cleft of the rock,” the glory of Jehovah passed before him,

doubly invisible,—invisible because of the very excess of light, and because of the divine darkness on the eyes of the prophet. As “the Lord passed by,” He made a fuller revelation of Himself than had probably ever before been granted to man: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty,”<sup>1</sup>—such a combination of phrases as ought to put to flight every doubt whether God loves man, with a stern warning as to the consequences of sin at the close. When those words had been spoken, the Divine hand seems to have been uplifted for a moment, and Moses, looking through the opening in the rock, caught a glimpse of the back of Jehovah, of some lingering radiance left behind by His glory, the grandest and most awful spectacle, the most immediate manifestation of Jehovah that mortal eyes have ever seen. What it was exactly the tongue could not tell, if the mind could conceive. Artists have sometimes tried to depict the scene; but the best art is that which leaves the glory off the canvas, and concentrates its skill upon the rapt and wondering prophet. In the whole Scripture there is nothing that is quite like it. Isaiah “saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,” but the temple was filled with the smoke that veiled Him; Ezekiel saw “above the firmament the likeness of a throne, and upon the likeness of the throne, the likeness as the appearance of a man”; three of the Apostles saw their Lord transfigured; Paul “was caught up into paradise, and heard

<sup>1</sup> These words are retained by the Revisers, but the phrase must of necessity be understood in harmony with the statement immediately preceding. The meaning is perhaps indicated in Ps. xcix. 8.

unspeakable words," and saw unspeakable things; and many a less man, in his moods of supreme devotion, has seemed almost to see the shaded outline of some Majesty and to catch the sound of words that came from no human lips. But here we are on an altogether different level, not amongst figures and similitudes, and the fancies of the devout, but in the presence of the actual glory of Jehovah. And there appears to be no reason for supposing that the self-revelation of God, in almost all other instances graded up the ages, and granted to man according to the stage of his preparation to receive it, has ever been or in this life will ever be more distinct and full.

Upon Moses himself the effect of the incident was very marked. Some reflection of the glory he had seen lingered upon his face, the skin of which so shone that the people "were afraid to come nigh him." Thenceforward he continued to them a mysterious being, who spoke to them through a veil, and whom they watched with awe as "the cloudy pillar" descended and shut him in the tabernacle with God. Nor was the change that took place in him one that affected merely his relationships with the tribes. For there are paragraphs and verses scattered through the later parts of the Pentateuch that exhibit him as a different man in himself, privileged above all his generation, so that Jehovah said of him, "With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches," and yet "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth," quick to forgive (Num. xii. 13), a stranger to envy (Num. xi. 29), a master of himself, chastened and purified by about the most marvellous experience through which mortal man has passed.

From Moses to the Christians of to-day there is a long

leap in time, but very little change in the manner in which God treats this longing. He still refuses it in part on the same ground that no man can see His face and live; and still grants it in part, making such revelations of His heart, and occasionally even of His glory, as both satisfy our present needs, and deepen our yearning for the beatific vision reserved for the future life. And these revelations are not the privilege of any special class, but are possible to every man, whilst no one can receive and even faintly understand them without being stirred by them, strengthened or softened or calmed.

1. It was a saying of a great Apostle many centuries ago that "the invisible things of God since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity" (Rom. i. 20, R.V.); and to that fact thoughtful men and many of the poets in every age, and some of the foremost representatives of modern science, freely consent. One Psalmist taught men to sing, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork;" and another, turning his thoughts from the sky to the earth, and almost anticipating the recent concentration of interest upon life and its forms, wrote, "I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well." Similarly the poet puts it, some of whose words it is now the wise fashion to ponder—

I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no less,  
In the kind I imagined, full fronts me, and God is seen God  
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul, and the clod.

It is occasionally imagined that the vision of God in nature has been obscured, if it has not been altogether eclipsed,

by the most important of our modern theories. But that was not the view of its great formulator in his later days; and it is possible to argue that the vision, instead of being dimmed, has been cleared of uncertainty and mist, and made a more adequate representation of the mystery it reveals. For the discovery of a great purpose of progress unfolding itself ever more completely under Divine control as the ages pass, is certainly not less a vision of glory than is the conception which it is supplanting of a series of special interferences and acts of creation,—made a series, simply because they result from the action of a single inexplicable Will. He who regards nature as a great temple, built up of parts that are superimposed some upon others without vital connexion, can see in it the glory of God; and no less can he, to whom the parts seem knit together in the bond of life, one springing out of another in virtue of powers and functions that are the gift of God and in harmony with a design that becomes Him. In the springtime to watch a bud swell, cast off its envelope, unfold in beauty and promise into leaf, blossom, fruit,—that is a vision of the glory of God, whether seen in the trees or in the ages. Heaven and earth already are full of His glory; but if it be true that the flowering-time of the universe has yet hardly come, there are manifestations above anything the keenest-eyed have ever caught awaiting those who remember that without holiness “no man shall see the Lord.”

2. Similarly, in history, how the glory of God has revealed itself!—in the collapses of nations that seemed to possess every element of strength and endurance save one, that gradually became more corrupt and rotten, until at last, in the time of their full iniquity, the righteousness of God

broke them ; in deliverances and magnificent triumphs, secured for godly peoples in their feebleness and oppression. A Christian reader of history, whose eye is open to discover the underlying principles and causes, will not be able to read many pages of the story of any nation without meeting with some wonderful manifestation of the glory or grace of God. In His providence over our personal lives, every one can probably remember experiences, when he was startled or quickened or awed by the feeling that God in His glory was there. In our consciences, how clearly we can sometimes hear the voice of God bidding us be good and just, full of truth and mercy ; and especially in the perplexities of duty, how often our ponderings seem to call up some august Presence, who partially reveals His own glory in His authoritative injunction of right ! A man who wants to find out something about God need simply recall his past life, and separate out in thought the Power that has presided over it and the moral Authority whose behests and sanctions are past questioning. Thereby he will be brought in some sense face to face with God, and will be ennobled or hardened, according to the use he makes of such an opportunity.

3. But none of these revelations come quite up to what Moses asked for, or to what we in many of our moods desire. The study of nature alone, though it be conducted with an artist's eye for beauty, and with such a degree of fancy as is able to infer much more than is proved, cannot discover in the world outside the glory of the face of God, but only that of some of His attributes. History too is a revelation, often apparently confused in its processes, and not always easily discernible in its meaning, of the methods and patience of Jehovah's rule, of the certainty with which He

establishes righteousness, but not of His face. In His providence over our lives, in the authority of conscience, in the various sciences of the mind, we can trace logical order and fitness, and sometimes we are led gradually up to a throne upon which sits the original source of all intelligence and morals. But that again is a vision, not of the face of God, rather of His mind and will. And very often we want more than that—to see “the King in His beauty,” to have our last doubts resolved, our last fears put to flight, mind and heart suffused with peace, by the actual sight or at least by a momentary glimpse of the very majesty of the God who rules over all. Is that or anything like it possible? There can be no doubt that the proper answer to the question is still that no man can see the face of God and live. Great advances have been made in experience and privilege since Moses lived, the boundaries of knowledge have been pushed ever farther into the fringes of mystery that surround the unknown, and to-day the Holy Spirit pours down His influence without measure, but God still dwells “in the light which no man can approach unto.” Yet we must not forget what St. Paul said concerning “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”; or what a greater than St. Paul said to one of His disciples, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” Reverent and eager communion with Christ enables a man to know more about God than he can get to know in any other way, or in all other ways combined. When interpreted in the crudest of senses, there is truth in that statement. Early Christian art was apt to represent the face of Christ as stricken and sad, with humanity and suffering love impressed upon every lineament; but think what that face must have been like, the radiancy of the eyes scarce veiled, the awful

Godhead breaking through its human bonds, when Christ said, "I have overcome the world," or when He rose from His great High-Priestly prayer. That is the lowest way of putting it. A man, who has any feeling approaching adequacy of what sin is and what the limit of his own spiritual knowledge and strength, and who will take those feelings to the Cross, will find there a revelation of the righteousness and mercy, of the heart and glory of Jehovah, not indeed immediate and direct, but above anything that was made known to the most privileged of Old Testament saints, and enough to engage his thoughts as long as he lives. For us accordingly, as for Moses and for all who have preceded us, the full gratification of this longing is reserved for the future. In this life "we see through a glass darkly" and know only in part; the glory of God passes before us in fragments, and often we are too dull to understand those: but when we awake, the fragments will all fit themselves together into a transcendent whole, we shall see God "face to face," and begin to know even as we are known. That is the vision of the glory of God "prepared for those that love Him," meeting their largest wish, satisfying mind and heart throughout eternity.

Of such a vision of God, in Christ or in heaven, the conditions are of necessity moral and spiritual rather than intellectual. Not that the intellect may for a moment be despised, even in relation to a kind of knowledge that is in part outside its range. It has already proved its competence to open up the way to God by clearing away myths and superstitions that were hiding Him from men; and the keener the intelligence, if it be but sanctified by grace, the more likely is it to search "the deep things of God." But that, when there is little in a man besides intellect, the veil



on the face of God is certain to prove impenetrable, or even to be deepened by dismal additions from the man's own imaginings, has received signal illustration in recent times in connexion with very popular pursuits and theories. It was the intelligence of a man who wrote<sup>1</sup> that his "mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts," and complained of "the atrophy of that part of the brain on which the higher tastes depend," that devised the favourite theory of modern science; it needed another man, whose brain was neither partially atrophied nor his soul dried up, to show, to the confession<sup>2</sup> of the father and ablest exponents of the theory in question, that one of its implications was actually the existence of a great God. History, according to intelligence simply, is a collection of events without much method in them beyond that which is supplied by the rivalries of dynasties and classes; according to men of more numerous gifts, it is an exhibition of the purposes and rule of God, and one of the greatest of its students once wrote, "In all my study of ancient times, I have always felt the need of something, and it was not until I knew our Lord that all was clear to me; with Him there is nothing that I am not able to solve." Similarly with ourselves, merely intellectual searching cannot "find out God"; but, says the Saviour, "the pure in heart" shall see Him. If that statement be put side by side with another, "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him," it becomes finally evident that the full knowledge of God and the vision of His glory can be obtained only through Christ, by the surrender of ourselves to Him. He who makes

<sup>1</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, i. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 189.

Christ his all in all, and day by day in every experience treats Him so, will find the darkening shadows of sin cease to cast themselves across his every vision of the glory. Thus living, our knowledge of Him will increase in its contents, in the satisfaction that it produces, in all its influences of assurance and strength, until at last it becomes immediate and complete, and we "see Him as He is."

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